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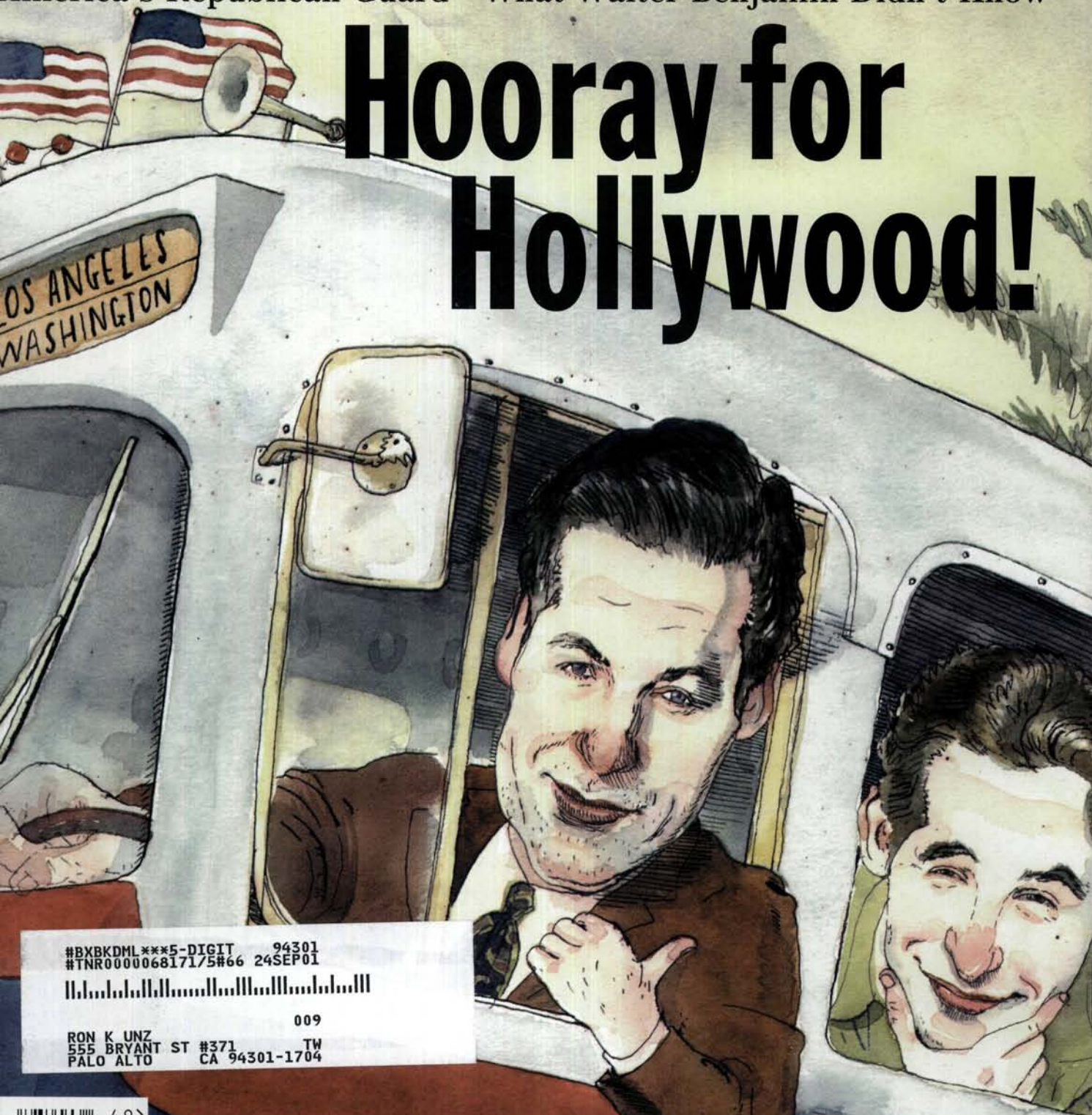

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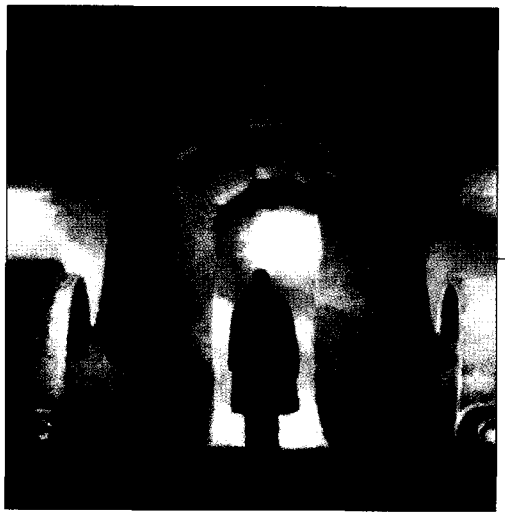

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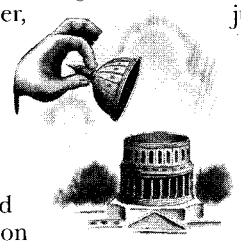
FROM WASHINGTON

Huntington's Disease

Ever since the end of the cold war, the foreign-policy elite has been fretting about American drift. Now a fresh theory is being floated to explain the alleged "fragmentation and hubris" of American foreign policy, as the lead essay in the most recent edition of *The National Interest* calls it. The article's author, James Schlesinger, a former secretary of Defense in the Nixon administration, blames the problem on the "excessive influence" amassed by American ethnic groups since 1989. Harvard professor Samuel Huntington, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, is even more explicit: "If multiculturalism prevails and if the consensus on liberal democracy disintegrates, the United States could join the Soviet Union on the ash heap of history."

In fact, Schlesinger's and Huntington's apprehensions have a familiar ring. As far back as 1787, New York's Gouverneur Morris warned the Constitutional Convention about proto-ethnic lobbies: "Admit a Frenchman into your Senate, and he will study to increase the commerce of France: an Englishman, he will feel an equal bias in favor of that of England." More than a century later, George F. Kennan, the father of containment, bemoaned the fact that Jews "pretty well dominated the formation of American opinion with respect to Russian matters."



Like those of Morris and Kennan, the fears of Huntington and Schlesinger contain an implication that ethnics are especially susceptible to "dual loyalty." Ethnic "diasporas," Huntington writes, have had an undue impact on American policy toward the Caucasus, the Balkans, Haiti, South Africa, Cuba, Northern Ireland, Israel. "Recent cases in the United States," he adds, "show that [diasporas] can be a source of spies used to gather information for their homeland governments."

It's no use denying that this "can be" true: in a shameful episode, Jonathan Pollard, an American Jew, sold secrets to Israel. But it's also no use denying that Huntington's observation is basically a smear. Note, for instance, how his formulation could be construed to mean Israel is the "homeland" of Jewish citizens of the United States. The fact is that, from Alger Hiss to Aldrich Ames, unhyphenated America has been an ample "source of spies," too.

Schlesinger's insinuations are just as hackneyed. "It is scarcely possible to overstate the influence of Israel's supporters on our policies in the Middle East," he writes, ascribing the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act to Jewish pressure. (Schlesinger begs the question of what the appropriate level of Jewish "influence" might be. Half of what it is now? Zero?) "It was as instructive as it was unusual," he observes, "for the President to choose as his setting for unveiling his increased sanctions against Iran an address to the World Jewish Congress in New York." But since when is it "unusual" for a president to talk about Middle East policy in front of a Jewish audience? Schlesinger's old boss, Richard Nixon, used to do it all the time. Yes, Jewish concerns had much to do with Clinton's unyielding posture toward Iran; but so did former Secretary of State Warren Christopher's desire to avoid a repeat of the Carter and Reagan administrations' Tehran fiascoes.

Both Huntington and Schlesinger glide over the fact that policies espoused by a particular ethnic group may coincide with U.S. interests. Schlesinger seems to think that the U.S. should cozy up to Middle East oil satrapies, but how wise was the Reagan effort to ingratiate the U.S. to Iranian "moderates," not to mention the Bush administration's pre-Gulf war "engagement" of Iraq? Indeed, was the Gulf war itself a battle to destroy an enemy of Israel, or a fight to save the Saudi and Kuwaiti oil baronies? In Haiti, the Clinton administration effort was not only a payoff to the Congressional Black Caucus, but also an eminently defensible means of stopping an influx of refugees—that is, an influx of people who would someday turn into the very sort of ethnic voting bloc that Schlesinger and Huntington identify as a source of American fragmentation! In fact, Haiti policy was traditional U.S. policy: the stability of the Caribbean basin has been a concern since Teddy Roosevelt's time.

Schlesinger goes on to contend that the Clinton administration's policy of NATO expansion can be explained as a sop to East European American voters. True,

continued on page 49

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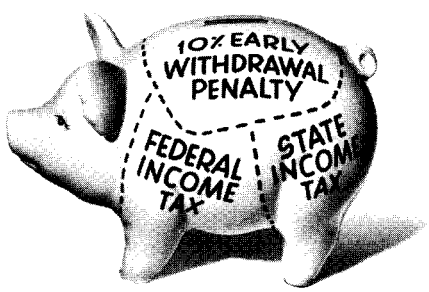

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CORRESPONDENCE

Troublemakers

To the editors:
From the tone of your "Yale Five" coverage, one would think the students in question were trying to ban shipments of sausage to New Haven supermarkets and replace the Yale bulldog with Menachem Mendel Schneerson ("Degree of Separation," November 3). So what if they want to live off campus? Those crazy, God-fearing Greenhorns! If only their Judaism were as assimilated and American as Seinfeld on Thursday nights!

JOSH DEUTCHMAN
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:
Peter Beinart attempts to equate the situation posed by ethnic theme houses at Cornell with the desire of five Orthodox Jewish students at Yale to move off campus. To pretend the issue in both cases is the merits of assimilation doesn't work. Cornell's desire not to provide ethnic theme housing to freshmen is best viewed as an effort on Cornell's part to promote assimilation. Yale's desire to impose a financial penalty on a group of Orthodox Jews who have chosen to live off campus by forcing them to pay $7,000 per year for campus housing that they are not planning to use is coercing assimilation.

ERIC J. PETERMAN
New York, New York

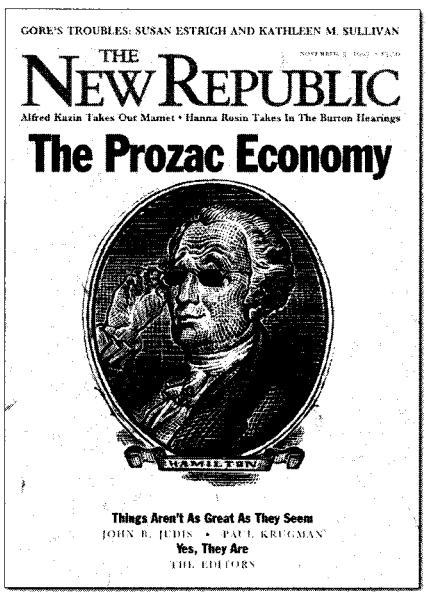
To the editors:
Peter Beinart thinks the case of the Orthodox Jewish students who want Yale to stop forcing them to live in coed dormitories in violation of their religious obligations is "essentially the same" as that of the students at Cornell who want their school to provide them with separate ethnic theme houses. As the attorneys representing the Yale students, we know he is wrong.

The Yale students are not asking for a Jewish dormitory. They have no objection to living with students from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds and are attending Yale because they want an education in multicultural surroundings. The students have requested that Yale accommodate their religious needs either by exempting them or by offering, to those students who choose it, a single-sex residence where rules against visitation by members of the opposite sex and against cohabitation are enforced.

Like many illiberal secularists, Beinart appears not to understand the Orthodox Jewish students. Beinart clearly thinks religion is merely another private taste or idiosyncratic preference that can, and should, be cast off or modified in the name of assimilation. But the students' religious faith, and the obligations it imposes, cannot be reduced to multicultural identity politics or theme-house-style ethnic separatism.

Religious belief and its obligations are privileged in our constitutional and civic traditions. Race, thankfully, no longer is. It is one thing to hope that we can subordinate racial and cultural differences in the name of assimilation, or to emphasize the importance of the Western intellectual tradition in our education. It is quite another to demand that believers betray their faith.

NATHAN LEWIN AND RICHARD GARNETT
Washington, D.C.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Yes, They Are
THE EDITORS

The exemption exception

To the editors:
Professors Estrich and Sullivan point to the Hatch Act (which explicitly exempts the president and the vice president) and contend that the same exemption must also apply under the Pendleton Act ("Calling Canard," November 3).

Actually, the language of the Hatch Act is a problem for Mr. Gore's defenders who seek to avoid the Pendleton Act's literal prohibition on fund-raising in federal offices by asserting that Congress intended the Pendleton Act to only apply to solicitation of federal employees. However, if one is searching for legislative intent, the contrast between the Hatch Act and the Pendleton Act suggests a congressional intent to exclude the president and vice president from the former, but not the latter.

The legal issues surrounding the vice president's fund-raising calls are not the no-brainers suggested by the vice president's defenders—or his critics, for that matter. Prosecutorial judgment should rest with an independent counsel, not the Justice Department.

EDWARD ZELINSKY
New York, New York

Exhortation

To the editors:
In the article "Defining Disability Down" (August 25), Ruth Shalit references my comparing parental tactics to the act of extortion. My recollection of the conversation I had with her was that this had to do with the special-education mediation process. The information I shared with her was that during attempts at mediating with parents, sometimes parents take the posture that if the school system will acquiesce to all of their requests, then the parents will agree to withdraw their application for due process. The reference to extortion was made by Ms. Shalit, not me.

Further, I did not say, "It used to be that kids didn't try hard enough, or didn't work hard enough.... Now, it's ADD or L.D.... They want their child to read half the material. They don't want them to take the same tests.... But guess what? They want him to get the same grades!" Those words were not mine. Special-education students are entitled by law to instructional adaptations and accommodations based on their disability. While an appropriate accommodation could be a reduction in the length of an academic assignment, there are other interventions that address individual student needs without compromising the integrity of the academic curriculum.

RAYMOND W. BRYANT
Montgomery County Public Schools
Rockville, Maryland

Ruth Shalit replies:
Yes, extortion was my word, which is why it wasn't in quotes. According to my notes of our conversation, Mr. Bryant's preferred term was "nuisance money." As for the quotation about ADD and L.D.: my notes show that it was accurately reported and presented in context.

We were right

To the editors:
You were correct to reject the jeremiads of Paul Krugman and John B. Judis in favor of a more upbeat perspective on the U.S. economy ("Shut Up and Smile," November 3). In fact, the economy is in even better shape than they recognized.

WILLIAM A. NISKANEN
Washington, D.C.

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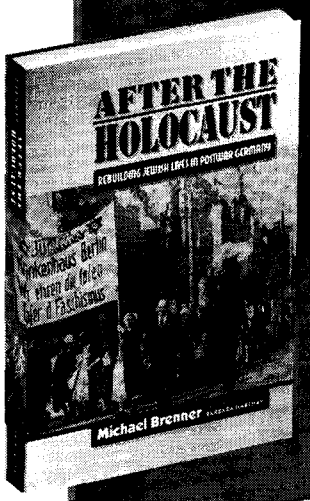

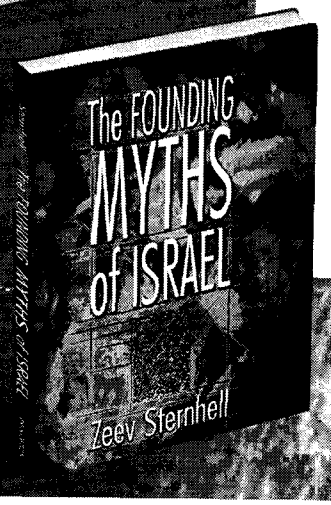

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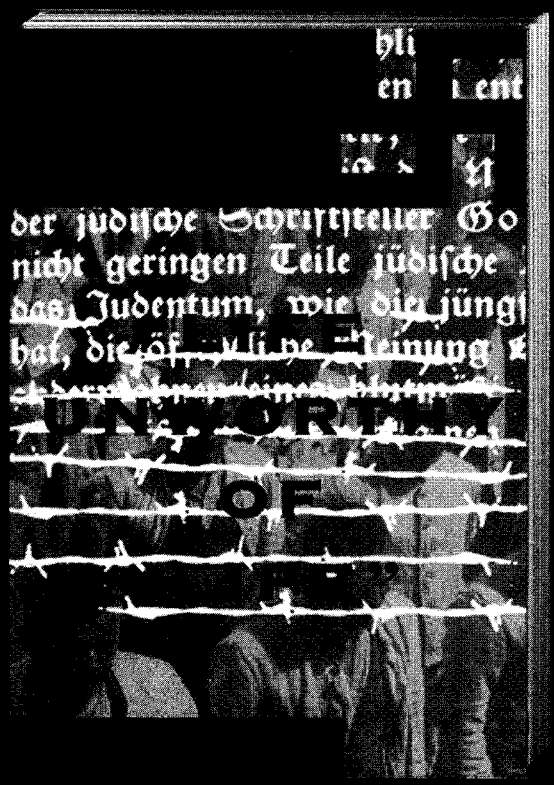

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DECEMBER 8, 1997

THE SADDAM SYNDROME

The confrontation between the United States and Iraq is not yet concluded, but Saddam Hussein is winning. By expelling United Nations weapons inspectors, he has already scored the major success of concealing his frightening new biological weapons. And he has received only ritualistic condemnation from the Europeans and Russians, whose soft approach to Iraq is directly related to their own eagerness to exploit its vast oil reserves. (See "Over a Barrel," by Ted Oehmke, p. 19.) Isolated by these backsliding former Gulf war coalition partners, the Clinton administration has signaled no resolve to handle Saddam unilaterally; instead, the latest American military plan seems to be to wait for the latest Russian diplomatic plan. National Security Adviser Sandy Berger has even indicated that the U.S. might consider expanding Iraqi oil exports under the current oil-for-food program, in exchange for a resumption of the now-compromised U.N. weapons inspections.

This is disastrous. Yet perhaps the most critical factor weakening the U.S. position has been the collapse of Arab support. Or, to be more precise: even among the peoples and leaders of ostensibly moderate Arab states, sentiment now favors Saddam. The Palestinians, of whose intrinsic moderation our opinion and policy elites are so desperately certain, are actually cheering him on with demonstrations all over the West Bank and Gaza. At a rally in Ramallah last week, the crowd implored, "Oh Saddam, my dear, drop your bombs on Tel Aviv!" This entreaty, from which there does not seem to be popular or official dissent, is simply mad. Were the Tikriti tyrant to hit Israel with toxin-tipped missiles, or to infiltrate deadly germs into the water supply, Palestinians would suffer excruciating suffocation and death right alongside the Jews. But this fact is not much of a deterrent in a political culture that conflates suicide with martyrdom, and calls terrorist murder holy war.

Of course, the Palestinians are merely reprising their cheers of seven years ago, when they applauded the Iraqi missiles flying over them toward Israel. What is somewhat more surprising, and considerably more galling, is that Kuwait, which wouldn't exist if not for American military power, has urged the U.S. to go easy on Iraq. So has the Saudi monarchy. It is not clear whether these regimes are actually silly enough to think that they are suddenly out of the dictator's sights, or whether they have merely lost confidence in American resolve, and thus returned to their old game of appeasing the dangerous tyrannies in the neighborhood. In either case, be sure that the Kuwaitis and the Saudis will once again cry for help if and when Saddam does move against them. They cry, of course, to Washington, and they are rightly confident that we will respond, not just with planes and ships but also with the cream of our youth. Just wait and see if this doesn't happen again.

Now, Iraq is not really a military power. As Fouad Ajami has written of its army's rout during Operation Desert Storm: "The despot's frightened men walked out of the desert to surrender to anyone who could have them. The Iraqis kissed the hand of their captors...." But Iraq does have a scientific capability in the matter of death and devastation. This frightens its Arab neighbors and, presumably, it also frightens non-Arab but Islamic Iran. These countries can never be sure Saddam won't turn the fruits of his laboratories against them, as he did to Iraq's own Shiites and Kurds.

Saddam's capabilities, considered in the context of the fickle political attitude of the Arabs, should not be abstractions to anyone, least of all to the government of Israel. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is irritated with Benjamin Netanyahu, and President Clinton even declined to see the prime minister on his recent visit to the U.S. Apparently Netanyahu has not met to their satisfaction some of the obligations Israel has undertaken in negotiations with the Palestinians. About the obligations the Palestinians have been stiffing ever since the Oslo accords were signed in 1993 the American response is less sharp. This American imbalance has undoubtedly made the Israeli cabinet, already burdened with ultra right-wing coalition partners, more skittish about concessions. Among the "innocuous" measures expected from Israel is the opening of an airport and a seaport in Gaza. But, given the porousness of such entrepôts even in the U.S., Iraq's biological weapons capability, and the enthusiasm of Palestinians for Saddam, is Israel's position intransigent or prudent?

It is easy for an American diplomacy that never quite manages to shake off Saddam Hussein to fall for the myth of linkage between pressuring Israel and acquiring greater authority in the Gulf. Our officials, Secretary Albright prominent among them, have let it be known that, but for the "Netanyahu problem," they

continued on page 14

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HOW ARE THE BELL MONOPOLIES STOPPING COMPETITION?

One family at a time
with outrageous costs
with interminable delays
with endless hassles

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Rob Cramer would have to work for 2 days to earn the money a local Bell monopoly charges to switch local service. ($261)

The Bell monopolies charge up to $261 to allow you to change local phone companies. To change long distance companies, a process that takes just about as much work, they charge just $5 or less.

This is another ploy clearly meant to discourage people from asking to try another local phone company. And, unfortunately, it works.

The Bell monopolies are creating new barriers to competition every day. But we won't stop until consumers get relief. MCI will work with federal and state regulators, and other new entrants, to open local markets to offer people a real choice. Together, we will make the regional Bells obey the spirit of the law, pass the Telecommunication Act's Fair Play Test, and stop abusing consumers.

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Source: Line installation and order charges effective 11/10/97: California $261, Florida $180, Massachusetts $126, Oregon $117, Wisconsin $92.

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The local Bell monopolies are forcing the Clark family to wait up to 6 weeks just to switch phone companies. 6 long weeks of hassles and higher rates.

People who ask to switch to a local phone company are often left in a state of limbo. Since they don't know when, or if, their request will be honored by the Bell monopoly. In some cases, people have to call their Bell monopoly as many as eight times to get any action at all, while at the same time paying higher rates and not getting the carrier of their choice.

The Bell monopolies are creating new barriers to competition every day. But we won't stop until consumers get relief. MCI will work with federal and state regulators, and other new entrants, to open local markets to offer people a real choice. Together, we will make the regional Bells obey the spirit of the law, pass the Telecommunication Act's Fair Play Test, and stop abusing consumers.

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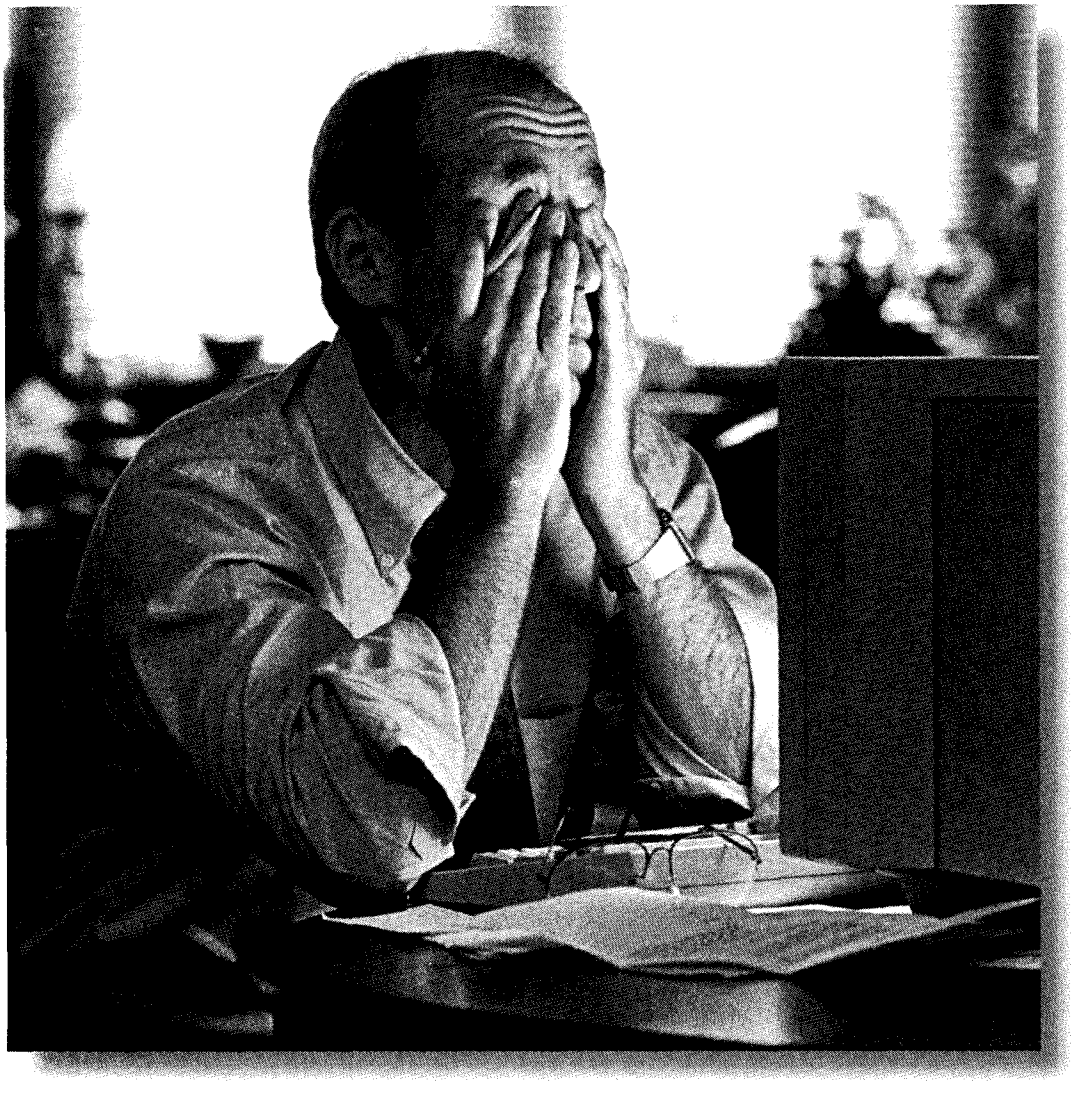
John Stinnett had the right to choose a new local phone company. He just wasn't prepared for the Bell monopoly bickering, arguing and hassles.



The Bell monopolies have their ways of keeping residential and small business customers. Instead of letting you switch local providers quickly and easily, Bell monopolies have argued, misled and delayed. Other times they pressure you to explain why you want to switch. Then there are those intimidating letters from the Bell monopolies that try to persuade you not to exercise your right to choose.

We think switching to a new local phone company should be as easy as choosing a new mechanic, a dry cleaner—or a long distance company.

The Bell monopolies are creating new barriers to competition every day. But we won't stop until consumers get relief. MCI will work with federal and state regulators, and other new entrants, to open local markets to offer people a real choice. Together, we will make the regional Bells obey the spirit of the law, pass the Telecommunication Act's Fair Play Test, and stop abusing consumers.

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would have been able to assemble the old Gulf war coalition of days past. This is delusional. Seven years ago we were joined by the easy riders in the Gulf, who have now gone their separate ways. Rescued by the U.S. back then, they have returned to their old complacent habits, and so it's simple for them to wave off American requests for help against Saddam by invoking the Israeli bogeyman. But it's one thing for these regimes to peddle such defective excuses and quite another for U.S. policymakers to believe them.

The real link between Israel and the Gulf is this: the closer the Palestinians and the Israelis come to a modus vivendi—and they will come to a modus vivendi—the more Arab governments whose only source of popular legitimacy is ritual anti-Zionism will have to acknowledge and deal with the presence of Israel in the region. And that is likely to be a predominant presence. Israel's economic and scientific achievements, tied to its success in the great enterprise at nation-building, dwarf those of the 200 million Arabs. Israel's richer neighbors have much to learn about Israel's technology and its poorer neighbors could use practical help and even investment. Israel has become an economic power because its hi-tech and bio-tech industries produce brainwork wanted by the U.S., Europe, China, India, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, and Australia. For the foreseeable future, however, the Arab countries will not sell anything of consequence to the big economies in the world, except petroleum; they produce nothing of scientific value.

Arab apoplexy at this reality may be measured by the boycott by all but six Arab invitees to the economic summit in Doha, the capital of Qatar. At the head of the Doha boycott was vast, impoverished Egypt. You would think that Egyptians would have seen the meeting as an opportunity to discuss links between their backward economy and Israel's more advanced one. That, at least, is what Doha's American sponsors hoped for. But, instead, Cairo takes America's aid and conspires against America's purposes—and not just by boycotting the meeting but by hectoring the Qataris for hosting it.

It has been 20 years since Egypt and Israel embarked on their "road to peace." But as Israeli journalist Ehud Ya'ari has just shown in a hair-raising article in *The Jerusalem Report*, this has not restrained the Egyptian media from descending over the years into the ugliest expressions of Jew-hatred. A rumor that a Lebanese singer was actually Jewish nearly got her records banned from Egyptian radio. One magazine praises storekeepers who put up signs saying, "Jews not allowed." The Egyptian government takes hypocritical refuge in the idea of freedom of the press, but President Hosni Mubarak leads the pack by his own initiatives. One of these is the siege against Israel in the U.N. General Assembly. Three times this year, and each time in a special session, the assembly has condemned Israel for building in Har Homa, as if this were the most pressing crisis in the world.

And now there is the atrocity in Luxor. A nemesis stalks the order and the state—and the economy—of Egypt: a terrorist fringe of radical Islamists and their deadly utopia. Confidently the Egyptian officials proclaim over and over again that the battle against the fringe has been won. But the roots of that phenomenon are deeper in the soil than the Egyptians admit. True, the terrorists cannot win; but the savage attack in Luxor offers dramatic evidence that, for all Mubarak's efforts to reclaim the tattered mantle of Arab leadership, Egypt has not been delivered of its own troubles.

Which brings us back to Saddam and his world. He, or more accurately his people, paid a very high price—about $100 billion in lost oil revenue due to sanctions—to be able to contemplate more killing on a grand scale. But this option provides a depressed Arab street with the thrill that one of their own really terrifies the world, the Israelis and the Americans especially. This is the kind of frisson that blinds people to their own true needs and interests. But it has not blinded the Israelis, who know what Saddam, and his many Palestinian admirers, wish for them. If President Clinton and Secretary Albright learn nothing else from this frustrating clash with Iraq, they should at least reflect on that. •

NOTEBOOK

HOLLYWOOD SQUARES: Victim politics has gone Hollywood. Doe-eyed soap star Hunter Tylo is suing the producers of Fox's *Melrose Place*, claiming that she was unfairly fired from the show after they learned she was (a) pregnant and (b) a born-again Christian who "didn't want her character to do bad things." Never mind that Tylo was hired to play "Taylor," a bikini-clad, beer-drinking vixen who lures away Heather Locklear's husband. Tylo, who is represented by feminist attorney Gloria Allred, thinks this is a case of impermissible discrimination. "You don't have to be a pencil to seduce a man," Tylo told reporters, adding that pregnant women should "never have to choose between having their child and their job." Fox pointed out at the trial that Tylo would have been in her third trimester while shooting some of the show's steamiest scenes. "It's hard to be a nice adultress," Fox Executive Producer Frank South told the jury. Added colleague Craig Erwich, "the understanding would be that in order to seduce someone, you would have to use all your physical attributes." The network will soon have a chance to find out. Tylo's replacement, Lisa Rinna, has just announced she, too, is pregnant.

BORKLETS: It's been a decade since a Democratic Senate shot down Ronald Reagan's nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court, and "to Bork" became a synonym for the hounding of any appointee. But the GOP thirst for revenge remains unquenched: now no Clinton appointee goes unborked. Last week, Senator James Inhofe tried to block the appointment of the openly gay James Hormel as ambassador to Luxembourg, because he might use this strategic post "to promote the gay agenda." Then there's the Surgeon General

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nominee David Satcher, the moderate director of the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control. John Ashcroft of Missouri, a presidential aspirant, finds it "shocking" that Satcher should "associate himself with partial-birth abortion." Satcher's "association" consists of answering a question from Senators by saying he opposed the procedure except to save a mother's life. Then the NRA discovered that, under Satcher, the CDC had funded a study to determine the chances that family members of gun owners would get shot. No doubt that probability is higher than the odds of a Democratic nominee getting a fair hearing from the Republican Senate.

BALANCED REPORTING:

U.S. will not avoid tough issues during Jiang's visit

—*Waterbury Republican-American*, October 29.

Issue worth discussing won't be talked about

—same paper, same day, same page.

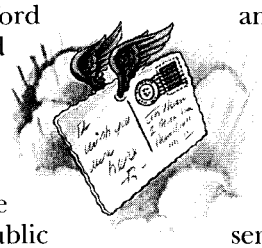
(Thanks to John Scully of Cheshire, Connecticut.)

HARTFORD POSTCARD

PHONE HOME

By Dante Chinni

Jonathan S. Bell has always been a step ahead. As a high school sophomore, he enrolled in classes at Florida A&M University. At the tender age of 23, he founded the JSB Funding Company, Inc., and began financing property management companies. Now, at 28, Bell may be onto something that would not only set him apart but take the underclass with him. Standing in the dank, dark basement of a Hartford housing project, he declares he has discovered the "answer to welfare reform": he wants to put computers in the projects, wire them up to a network, and then have residents use the machines for telemarketing.



Given the fact that telemarketers may be about the only class of people held in lower public esteem than welfare recipients, this might not seem like the best way to bring impoverished inner-city residents back into society's mainstream. But Bell claims that he has hit upon a utopian intersection of technology and public policy. Welfare recipients, who usually lack reliable transportation and money for child care, could now work from home. They would be supporting themselves *and* keeping an eye on their kids. What's more, they could take advantage of the computer networks to gain more skills, by taking classes online or even shopping in virtual malls. "If I can take an apartment complex and make it a mall, a school, an office complex, and a grocery store," Bell enthuses, "it's a whole new paradigm."

Although Newt Gingrich's proposal to give the poor laptops was ridiculed, Bell's proposal is getting a serious try-out: with the help of some local funders plus $400,000 made available by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, he has already placed computers in six apartments and is working on 40 more. And LaDonna Pavetti of the Urban Institute, a think tank that has done some of the most respected research on welfare and employment policy, says the plan has potential. "It could work because it would allow people to work at their own pace," she says. "It's going to require a certain amount of training and for some people it's not going to work, but it could be very positive." In all likelihood, Pavetti says, the people Bell wants to reach lack the skills for anything but fast-food work anyway. "And I'll tell you," she adds, "I'd take a desk job making phone calls over flipping burgers any day of the week."

Certainly the jobs are there. According to *Telemarketing Magazine*, the 50 largest telemarketing firms will see their billable minutes climb to nearly five billion in 1997. While Bell doesn't hide his motives—he wants to harness that growth and make a buck—he also seems genuinely interested in helping project residents. But still there are reasons for skepticism. "To call that plan silly is flattering to it," says the Heritage Foundation's Robert Rector. "It's not going to hurt anyone, but it's going to cost a fortune and it's not going to reduce the welfare load in any appreciable way. The people who are motivated are going to do well with this program, but they would have done well without it." And, he might add, without the $400,000 investment.

Rector also points out that working from home can take more discipline than working elsewhere. And even if technology can monitor how many calls workers make or whether they waste time surfing the Web, software isn't a real boss, and home isn't a real workplace. At least in theory, welfare reform isn't about merely weaning people off the rolls. It's supposed to end their social isolation and help them deal with a variety of personalities and the structure of a workday. Don't forget, too, that it is not a sure-fire business proposition: peak telemarketing hours may not coincide with the school day. "It may be a bit disconcerting for the caller to be dealing with an operator continuously yelling 'Stop that' or 'Put that down,'" observes Kent Weaver, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. "At least, that's been my experience as a parent."

And what do the Hartford parents experience? Adeline Fornez, a 40-year-old working mother of three who lives in the project, got her computer back in April. She and her two daughters, one of whom is seeking a bachelor's degree in business, are getting the telemarketing training with Bell. "My daughters are looking at it as a

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way to make money and get some experience," she says. "I'm not good on the phone, but I'm taking the training in case they need someone to back them up. And who knows? Maybe next year I'll branch out into it." Kareem Gadson, a 20-year-old student at the University of Hartford who serves as the building's computer troubleshooter, says the computers make his life easier. "You know how it is at college. You sign up on the sheet at the computer lab and wait. I'm not the type of person who likes to wait. So I would just say, 'Forget it,' " Gadson says. "Now I can just go home and get things done." Bell's supporters cite both cases as success stories. But they are grist for his critics as well. Although Gadson and Fornez's family are putting the computers to good use, their desire to get an education and to work suggests that they would thrive even without the technology.

I leave the basement still not entirely sure where this unlikely project is heading. Could Jonathan Bell actually be a visionary? I muse. Just then, a pudgy eight-year-old boy in a sideways baseball cap comes in to ask Gadson for help finding an icon on his screen. I ask Gadson if the kids keep him busy with such problems. "They called me all the time at first," he says, "but now they either fix it themselves or a friend shows them how." Clearly, learning is going on here. But if Bell is to succeed, he needs a lot of residents with Gadson's and Fornez's spark, and people who are motivated enough to stay interested in telemarketing over the long haul. And that's where I grow skeptical once again. Let's face it, no matter how much you support welfare reform, if someone calls you during dinner to offer you a new credit card at a special low rate, your response will always be the same. Click.

DANTE CHINNI is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance journalist.

How Judge Zobel decided for the media.

IN CAMERA

By Terry Moran

Somewhere, Lance Ito is smiling. The murder trial of the British au pair Louise Woodward has demonstrated once again how difficult it can be for that venerable eighteenth-century construct, the American court, to withstand the pressures of late twentieth-century media attention. Judge Hiller Zobel's decision to reduce a jury's second-degree murder verdict to involuntary manslaughter, and set Louise Woodward free, has shown that even the most sober of judges can get caught up in a media frenzy. Thus, this case ended by reinforcing the popular perception that an American trial is a kind of thrillingly unpredictable game show, the outcome of which has more to do with emotions of the moment than with lasting principles of justice.

Actually, for much of *Commonwealth* v. *Woodward*, it did not seem that this televised case would sink to the level of *People* v. *Simpson*. The prosecutors (in contrast to Marcia Clark, et al.) were resolute and well-prepared; the defense, led by Barry Scheck (who alone in the Simpson case seemed always to remember he was in a court of law), was vigorous and intellectually honest. And for much of the case, Judge Zobel presided with such efficiency and learning that lawyers with other cases in the courthouse would stop by to witness that rare event, a murder trial both sensational and edifying.

Still, there were always signs that even Zobel's head could be turned by the thrill of being in the spotlight. For instance, he took the unusual step of holding daily "background" press briefings. Zobel could not be quoted, and he would not talk directly about the case. The sessions were generally uncontroversial and especially helpful to the dozen or so British journalists covering the case. But as the trial drew more and more media interest, and began to dominate first the local and then the national news, it became apparent to those at the briefings that more than mere judicial solicitude toward foreign observers was at work. Judge Zobel was really enjoying himself.

One of the things Zobel especially seemed to enjoy was the fact that the trial in his courtroom was being so closely watched in Britain, the defendant's home country. An 18-year-veteran of the Massachusetts trial bench, a former professor of law at the Boston College Law School, and a Harvard Law School graduate, Zobel also did a brief stint at Oxford as a young man in the late 1950s, and has been an unabashed Anglophile ever since, the kind of guy who's been known to muse aloud about British track star Roger Bannister's days at Oxford.

During the course of the trial, he delighted in displaying his knowledge of British idiom, slang, and culture; he relished chatting with the British reporters covering the case. On the day after the jury's verdict, but before his ruling modifying the conviction, Zobel was presiding over pre-trial motions in another case when three British reporters walked into his courtroom and sat down. David Usborne of *The Independent* told me all they wanted was to see the judge's clerk about scheduling matters. Zobel saw the reporters, waved them to the front of the courtroom, and bantered with them while the American defendant waited in shackles.

The critical ruling in the Woodward case was Zobel's decision to grant the defense's request to "roll the dice" and give the jury the stark choice of either convicting the 19-year-old British au pair of murder or acquitting her. After the jury returned the only verdict available given that ruling and given their findings that the injuries which killed Matthew Eappen were not accidental and that Louise Woodward had lied on the witness stand, Judge Zobel demonstrated just how much he enjoyed being the center of attention, both here and abroad.

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The procedural posture of the case following the murder conviction was routine: the defense filed a common motion under Rule 25(b) of the Massachusetts Rules of Criminal Procedure, seeking to have the jury verdict set aside or the conviction reduced from murder to manslaughter. Zobel, like trial judges all over America, has heard thousands of such motions. They are usually dispatched with little fanfare. This time, however, the judge heard an hour of oral argument from each side on national television, and then wrote two extraordinary rulings, one of which he posted on the Internet.

In his memorandum and order reducing the verdict to manslaughter, Zobel began by quoting John Adams—whose legal writings have been published in a little-known collection edited by Zobel himself—and then went on to declare how impervious a judge must be to public pressure. "Elected officials," he wrote, "may consider popular urging and sway to public opinion polls. Judges must follow their oaths and do their duty, heedless of editorials, letters, telegrams, picketers, threats, petitions, panelists, and talk shows." That litany precisely describes the many forms of media swirling around the Woodward case. Zobel continued: "In this country, we do not administer justice by plebiscite. A judge, in short, is a public servant who must follow his conscience, whether or not he counters the manifest wishes of those he serves; whether or not his decision seems a surrender to the prevalent demands." It's an admirable sentiment, but rather portentously expressed, given the routine issue before him. As Brandeis University professor Jeffrey Abramson told *USA Today*, "The gentleman protests too much."

Later in the ruling, in explaining why he allowed the defense lawyers to eliminate the manslaughter option from the jury's consideration, even though the facts in the case seemed to warrant it, Zobel declared that the law could not be a "casino," that Massachusetts "never has and does not now view Justice as a handmaiden to Tyche, the Goddess of Good Fortune." Tyche? The Goddess of Good Fortune? In a 25(b) ruling?

The melodrama continued right through the final courtroom scene. Zobel's order reducing the conviction ended with the command: "Defendant be brought before this Court Monday, November 10, 1997, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, then and there to receive her sentence." That left five hours between his ruling and sentencing—no time for the regular pre-sentence investigation, or for the parents of the victim to return from out of state to bear witness to the justice the killer of their baby would now receive. And, it's fair to say, no time for genuine, dispassionate consideration. Zobel had clearly made up his mind and did not want to wait the several weeks which these things normally take. After all, by then the press might have moved on to other stories.

So there was one more live, internationally televised event from Hiller Zobel's courtroom. Each side argued for a few minutes, then the judge retired to his chambers for about 15 minutes, a Solomonic pause which, given the circumstances, seemed disingenuous. Then he resumed the bench and freed the defendant, with another carefully written ruling. "It is time to bring the judicial part of this extraordinary matter to a compassionate conclusion," he wrote. That line has been widely quoted, with the debate centering on the question of how "compassionate" the judge had been to the victim's family, in light of his finding that Louise Woodward did, in fact, kill the baby. But the more revealing word is "extraordinary." What was so extraordinary, *inside the courtroom*, about the Woodward case? A caretaker stood accused and convicted of killing the child in her charge. It happens all the time in America, and in Britain, too. The only extraordinary aspect of the case was what was happening *outside* the courtroom. By that, by the sound and fury of the media, Hiller Zobel was swept away.

The Woodward case is bound to raise again the old cry of the established bench and bar: take the cameras out of courts. Gag the lawyers. Sequester the jurors. Stop the presses (and broadcasts). But that, of course, is no solution. On the verge of the twenty-first century, we cannot limit public access to one branch of government to eighteenth-century technology. The solution is not that easy, or that grand. It rests not with legislators, but with individual judges, lawyers, jurors, and journalists. Many of those involved in highly publicized cases, like the prosecutors and defense lawyers in the Woodward case or Judge Mary Lupo in the rape trial of William Kennedy Smith, have managed to concentrate on the matter at hand and acquit themselves professionally; many others have not. The difference is not one of public access or even of press conduct (which can, of course, be disgraceful). The difference is one of character.

TERRY MORAN covered the Woodward trial for ABC News.

THE HARD QUESTIONS

UNBALANCED

By Ronald Steel

You've got to hand it to Saddam Hussein: he is the ultimate survivor. And what drives the United States up the wall is not so much that he is duplicitous, or dangerous, or even evil, but that no matter how much we huff and puff there is not a lot that we can do about it. He is the fly in our superpower ointment, the living proof that even awesome power has its own built-in limitations, that you can be Number One on all the charts and still not be able to get your way—or even squash the pesky fly that torments and obsesses you.

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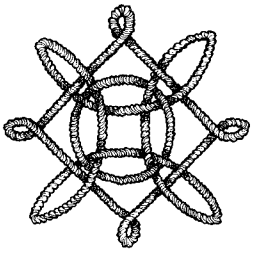
Of course, what makes this current round of sweating and swearing so embarrassing is that we brought it on ourselves. Many now argue that the big mistake came six years ago when George Bush, on the advice of his chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, and his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, did an about-face in the desert and allowed Saddam to emerge from the Gulf war with his title and his Republican Guard—if not his honor—intact.

Their argument was that maintaining a favorable balance of power in the region—that is, keeping neighboring Iran in check—required a reasonably strong Iraq. Without Saddam, they believed, the country might collapse into civil war, with the Kurds snatching away parts of the north and the Shiites doing the same in the south. So, playing a dangerous game of geopolitics, they weakened Saddam on the assumption that they could then control him. They were wrong.



But they were wrong not because a balance of power was the wrong objective. They were wrong because they lacked the conviction, and the skill, to play the game properly. Instead of using Saddam as a pawn, they fell into the trap of portraying him, and treating him, as a nemesis. To be sure, he is an evil and untrustworthy character. But that is not particularly relevant in the policy game that they tried to play. They could have destroyed Saddam and made up with the Iranians, or they could have slapped Saddam on the wrist. But they did neither. Instead, the Bush administration—and later the Clinton administration—eventually adopted a policy of trying to contain both Saddam *and* the Iranian mullahs.

The result was to put the United States in the absurd position of becoming the worst enemy of two countries that hate each other. Classic balance-of-power strategy dictates that an outside state seeking to control a region should always side with the weaker regional state—even if that means supporting unsavory countries or switching allegiances once the weaker state becomes the stronger, and vice versa. This is called Divide and Rule. Or as Palmerston put it: "We have no eternal allies and no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal, and those interests it is our duty to follow." It may not be very appealing morally, but it allowed Britain to maintain its empire and, for a hundred years (from 1815 to 1914), prevent any single challenger from dominating the European continent.

And it is the policy that the U.S. followed in the Middle East from 1979, when the Shah of Iran fell, to 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait. During the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran, which Saddam launched in 1980, the U.S.—along with France, Russia, and the oil-rich Gulf states, including Kuwait—supported Iraq. They did this not because they liked Saddam, but because they feared the Iranian mullahs and their appeal to the Muslim masses.

Saddam eventually lost this support, not because he was a bloodthirsty aggressor, but because his attack on Kuwait threatened the conservative monarchies of the Gulf that assured a steady flow of cheap oil to the West. Allowing him to retain power once the American-led retaliation had humbled him may not have been popular, but it was consistent with longstanding American strategy—siding with the enemy of your enemy—in the region.

The reason that strategy has now failed is that we have lost sight of the primary objective. Instead of using the enmity between Iran and Iraq to advance our own interests, we have managed to focus their competitive hatreds on us. Although the Iraqis themselves hate Saddam, masses elsewhere in the Middle East admire him precisely because he has stood up to the Americans and gotten away with it. Sanctions have not forced him to give up his weapons of mass destruction. Only his defeat, or a change of heart, will induce him to do so. But the latter is unlikely, while the former would deeply divide NATO just as we are trying to push through its expansion; it would also antagonize Russia whose cooperation we need and trigger a dangerous wave of anti-Americanism throughout the Muslim world.

Where does this leave us? Back to Divide and Rule. Instead of trying to contain the two strongest states of the region, we should take advantage of their competitive hatred by letting them contain each other. Is a hostile Iraq getting too strong? Then repair the fences with Iran so that the mullahs will again look to Baghdad rather than to Washington for the Great Satan. If a strong Iran becomes too powerful, make up with Iraq. This may not win us prizes for sincerity. But it may get us what we want, instead of, under the present policy, continued frustration, isolation, and ineffectuality. •

Saddam's slick oil deals.

OVER A BARREL

By Ted Oehmke

Moments after China, France, and Russia abstained from voting to threaten Iraq with new United Nations sanctions on October 23, Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaaf addressed the media outside the Security Council's meeting room. "This resolution reflects the view of two [Security Council] members to impose their sick norms [on Iraq]," he said, as Richard Butler, the Australian chief of the U.N. weapons inspection team, glared at him from the top of a nearby stairway. "It is now up to our leadership and people ... to consider how to respond." By now the world knows what that response was: the expulsion of the American members

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on the inspections team, the subsequent withdrawal of the whole team from Iraq, and another crisis in which Iraq and the United States stand at the brink of military confrontation.

What emboldened Iraq to portray this confrontation as a struggle between themselves and only "two" of the Security Council's members—Britain and the United States? Partly, it's the breakdown of the peace process in Israel and the perception by some countries that the U.S. has been an overzealous sanctioner. But a major factor is the wheeling and dealing between Iraq and the state-owned or -influenced oil companies of China, France, and Russia, all of whom wield vetoes as permanent members of the Security Council. The deals are mainly just letters of intent for the time being, but profits for both Iraq and its new partners will begin to flow the minute sanctions are lifted. As Saddam no doubt intended, offering up the lucrative rights to future exploitation of Iraqi oil reserves has left the U.S. increasingly isolated on the Security Council—the body that ultimately decides whether the sanctions against Iraq remain in place.

The world's oil companies eagerly await the day they can have access to Iraqi crude again. Iraq has more than 100 billion barrels of proven oil reserves (that is, oil that can be profitably extracted under current technological and economic conditions). Only Saudi Arabia has more. But the U.N.'s oil-for-food program, which began in December of 1996, severely limits Iraq's production. Iraq may sell only $2 billion worth of crude every six months, under the watchful eye of roughly 200 international monitors (none of whom is American), who assure that two-thirds of the proceeds are spent on aid for the Iraqi people while the rest goes to war reparations for Kuwait, operating expenses, and an escrow account.

Not that Iraq could necessarily extract much more oil if it were permitted to do so. The Gulf war all but destroyed Iraq's production capacity. Saddled with a $200 billion external debt, Iraq cannot get its oil fields back in shape for profitable production without a vast infusion of foreign capital and technical expertise.

This is where the permanent members of the Security Council come in. The first major commercial deal between Iraq and a Security Council country was signed on March 21 by then-Russian Fuel and Energy Minister Pyotr Rodionov. The Russians pledged most of the $3.5 billion necessary to get the massive West Qurna oil field ready for production again; in return, they'll get a share of the $70 billion the field is projected to make in the next 23 years. Rodionov even claimed that "execution of the contract will start regardless of the lifting of economic sanctions." Although Moscow later disavowed that remark, most analysts agree that the deal reflected, in part, Russia's eagerness to reassert itself as a world power. With Iraq owing Russia an estimated $10 billion in pre-war debt, how long can the U.S. expect a cash-starved, power-seeking Russia to keep its recently privatized oil industry from busting sanctions?

The Iraqis' next agreement came with the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation, which has promised to provide $500 million for a stake in the 1.4 billion barrel Ahdab oil field. (According to the April 14 issue of *Oil & Gas Journal*, the Chinese deal took place amid reports that the U.N. was investigating charges that the Chinese were also trading weapons for Iraqi oil.) Given the technological backwardness of the Russian and Chinese oil industries, these deals are difficult to explain in purely business terms. According to Tom Wallin of the New York City-based Energy Intelligence Group: "If you took the politics out of it, it would be very unlikely for Iraq to solicit China or Russia for oil field development. The decision to go with the Chinese in particular seems linked or at least heavily influenced by the Security Council issue."

But Iraq is reaching out to the more technologically advanced West as well—specifically to France. Reports in several trade-industry periodicals mention verbal agreements between the Iraqis and the French firms Total and Elf Aquitaine. According to *Oil & Gas Journal*, the Iraqis promised Total future access to the six-billion-barrel Nahr Umr oil field in exchange for capital and technology, while they guaranteed Elf access to Majnoun, which contains seven to ten billion barrels. A French official familiar with Security Council dynamics defends the companies: "Many companies, including Americans, are talking to Iraq," he says. "But Total and Elf have no legally signed contract because that would be against the sanctions regime. The compliance record of the French is excellent and will continue to be."

That's technically true, but the French have a history of coupling foreign policy with the quest for oil, going back to the time of de Gaulle in Algeria. Total, formerly the state-owned energy company, has historically been the commercial representative for French state energy interests. Although the French petroleum industry still has significant holdings in the U.S., some analysts interpret the recent divestiture of Total North America as a means of preparing for U.S. sanctions against the French firm that its dealings with states like Iraq could bring. Furthermore, Iraq owes French companies several billion dollars in pre-war debt, according to French officials. This money cannot be repaid until sanctions are lifted.

So has Saddam Hussein's recently intensified courtship of big oil paid off? Following the vote of October 23, Saddam believed he had "nothing to lose by escalating" his clash with the U.S., says Dr. Mohammed Abduljabbar, senior economist and oil analyst for the Washington D.C.-based consulting firm, Petroleum Finance Company. "The Security Council message was: it isn't going to lift sanctions, but Russia, China, and France don't feel strongly about it." And since oil contracts do not often survive a change of regime, these deals may, in Saddam's mind, give these Security Council members an incentive to assure that he remains in power for a long time to come.

TED OEHMKE is a freelance writer living in New York City.

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CBS gives the former Senator an assist.

AIR BRADLEY

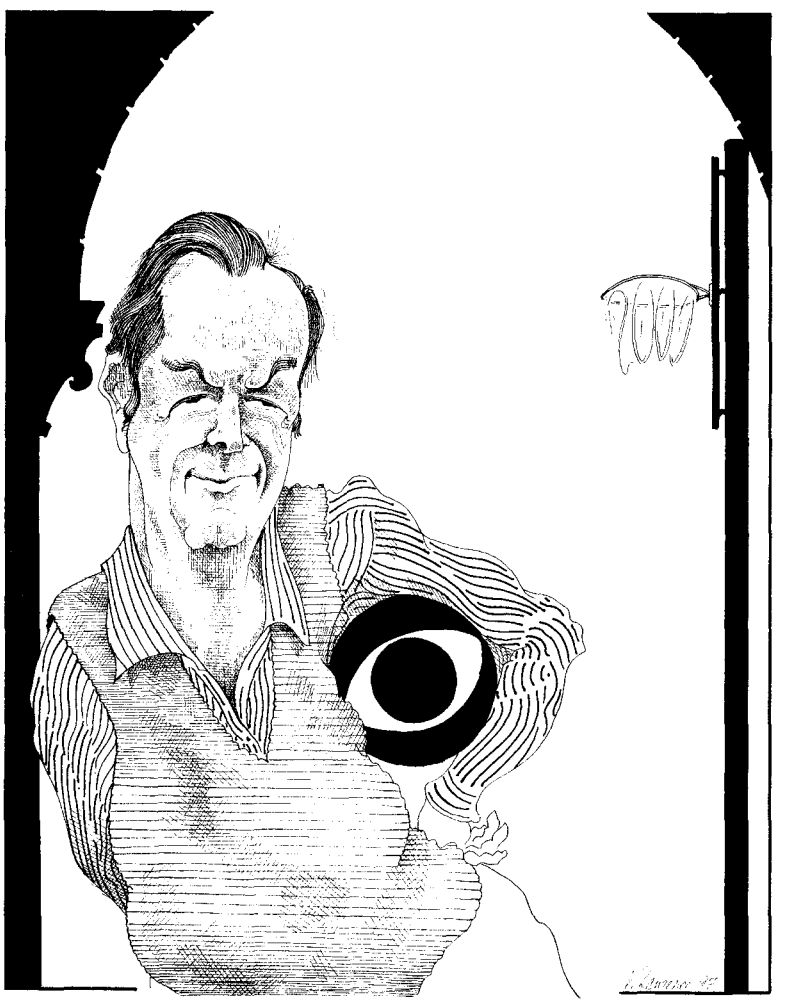
By Ruth Shalit

"Only time will tell whether one can establish another way of reaching people," Bill Bradley mused to *The New York Times* upon his resignation from the Senate in 1996. Well, now Bradley has found a way. The former Senator from New Jersey is drawing rave reviews as an "essayist" on the CBS *Evening News*. And what the press likes best is that he steers clear of the political controversies that used to occupy him in Washington. "His topics are often non-political," noted Richard Berke in *The New York Times* on October 26. In an interview with Bradley, *The Los Angeles Times*' Mark Barabak agreed: "The topics you covered in your essays—humility, dealing with personal tragedy ... seem explicitly non-political."

But that's exactly the point. Bradley on CBS is a mellow, reflective kind of guy, concerned chiefly with why Americans should feel good about themselves. "Unlike any other nation in history," he explained on August 30, "our country has always been driven toward an ideal—the American dream." Even the twentieth anniversary of the death of Elvis became an occasion to affirm the greatness of the American people and profess his compassion for various constituencies. "Just being famous doesn't make people important," Bradley said. "The *real* heroes of America are the parents and workers who do their jobs every day unknown." When commentator Bradley addresses the fraught matter of race, it is to assert his pride in the nation's ethnic diversity. "We all know in our hearts," he says, "the first step toward resolving our differences is talking."

Bradley certainly has been talking to many people these days, and not just the people who watch CBS News on Sunday nights. According to *The New York Times*, he has set up a small headquarters in Palo Alto, California, staffed by veteran Democratic campaign operative Ed Turlington. His office blast-faxes copies of "Bill Bradley News," a cheerful gazette of his comings and goings, to the former Senator's supporters across the country. And, on October 24, the Washington financier Jonathan Ledecky threw a dinner party for Bradley at his home. "The sense we got was that he was putting out feelers with the Washington business community," says one attendee. "He was raising his profile a little bit."

For some people at CBS News, that raises a question: Is Bill Bradley running for president? And, if so, are his slickly packaged weekly homilies really an appropriate use of CBS's airtime? "At what point do we get to the point where we're giving an unfair advantage to somebody?" asks one correspondent for CBS *Evening News*. Another staffer reports that the network has received angry calls from representatives of one of Bradley's potential presidential competitors. "I think it is problematic, and it's something that I have to confront in my job because I'm dealing with people who may be running against him," a producer for the network told me. "We're giving him a platform that we're not giving other candidates."



BILL BRADLEY BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Perhaps because the messages are calculatedly homiletical and personal, they have largely escaped the notice of the media critics who have assailed CBS for hiring Bradley's former congressional colleague, Susan Molinari. Sandy Genelius, a chief spokeswoman for CBS News, vehemently rejects the suggestion that CBS is giving Bradley a free opportunity to hone his message and polish his delivery for an eventual presidential run. "I'd

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be careful about saying they look like campaign ads," she told me. "He's not espousing a political ideology in those pieces. He's talking about generic ideals, and connecting them to the way we relate to each other every day. And so I think the intended message is very different."

But for Bradley, the medium is the message. His two-minute, highly produced "essays" are Deaveresque in their filmic ambition. Here he is on a tree-lined street, ruminating on his career as a "citizen politician"; in front of the FDR Memorial, professing compassion for the disabled; and, in a burnished office, commemorating the forty-year anniversary of Eisenhower's enforcement of *Brown* v. *Board of Education*. "You've gotta walk this lonesome valley," he says, his voice amiable, reassuring, paternal. "You gotta walk it by yourself."

Then there's "Immigration," an emotionally charged, flag-filled collage of patriotic scenes: the Statue of Liberty, the rippling blue ocean, a row of new citizens smiling as they take their oaths of allegiance. "We are, nearly all of us, the children of immigrants," says Bradley, speaking quietly, directly into the camera. "They are an undeniable reason why our nation never grows stagnant, and keeps on renewing itself." "Oh yes, and one more thing," says the CBS news essayist. "I *live* with an immigrant. Her name is Ernestine and we've been married twenty-three years. Raising our very independent—high-spirited—all-American daughter." (Bradley's wife, Ernestine, is a native of Germany.) The spot ends there, with an image of Bradley dissolving over a long shot of a bridge and a sunrise. It's morning in America all over again.

In perhaps his most affecting segment, Bradley delivers a pontifical indictment of bad sportsmanship. After casually sinking a free throw, the former Senator turns pensively to the camera. "Something seems wrong somehow these days," he says, tucking the ball under his arm. "Instead of regarding your opponent as an honorable adversary, athletes seem to enjoy degrading each other."

Cut to a noisy shot of NBA players baiting one another on the court. "In pro basketball these days," Bradley sighs, "trash talk profanes the game.... Football players rarely offer a hand to help an opponent to his feet." All this nastiness, Bradley points out, is in contrast to his own certified integrity. "During my career in basketball I always tried to be guided by the advice I got from a high school coach," he says. "When you win, don't crow. When you lose, don't cry." A sly smile plays over Bill Bradley's placid features. "I still take satisfaction," he says, "in the knowledge that while I always gave my best, I only played clean." •

Has the U.S. military become a partisan force?

GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLICANS

By Andrew J. Bacevich and Richard H. Kohn

The Republican-led reaction against Sara E. Lister, who was forced to resign last week as assistant secretary of the Army after calling the U.S. Marines "extremists," has a familiar ring to it. Ever since the late 1960s, when leading Democratic liberals turned against the Vietnam War, Republicans have been winning votes as the avatars of a strong national defense and, by extension, champions of the honor and prerogatives of America's fighting men.

But the sharp GOP reaction to Lister's comments was also emblematic of something new—and troubling. In recent years, Republicans have increasingly regarded the 1.4 million members of the all-volunteer military and their families as a political interest group—a part of the Republican coalition to be showered with benefits in the name of a strong national defense, just as Democrats have courted teachers' unions and environmental groups. And, according to a mounting body of political research, the professional officer corps that leads the armed forces is reciprocating. Heretofore a matter of temperament, military conservatism has become a matter of ideology. Today's officers scorn "liberalism" and all its works, and consider Democrats presumptively anti-military and therefore untrustworthy.

In his new book, *Making the Corps*, Thomas E. Ricks of *The Wall Street Journal* explains that in each of the four services "open identification with the Republican party is becoming the norm," particularly among recently commissioned officers. Ricks characterizes today's junior officers as overwhelmingly "hard-right Republican" and "largely comfortable with the views of Rush Limbaugh."

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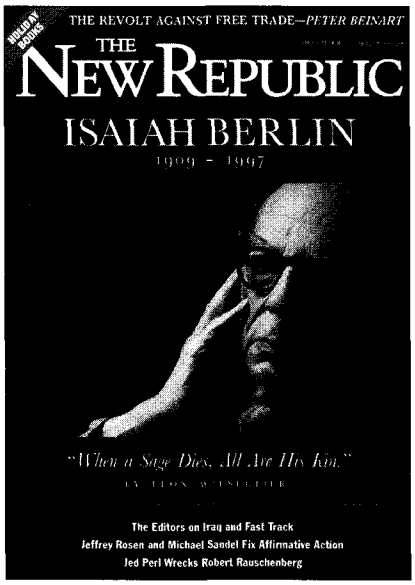
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Ricks cites research by Major Dana Isaacoff, who taught at West Point in the early 1990s. Over several years, Isaacoff surveyed her students and found that the typical section had no Democrats or Independents, just Republicans. Reporting that her students "overwhelmingly identified themselves as conservatives," Isaacoff found that, in voicing Republican views, her cadets tended to take positions so extreme that they seemed like caricatures. Young West Pointers bashed welfare chiselers, the "liberal media," and Congress (which was then still under Democratic control).

Skeptics questioned the significance of Isaacoff's anecdotal evidence. Yet more recent and more comprehensive work by Professor Ole Holsti of Duke University corroborates her conclusions. Holsti's research, which Harvard's Olin Institute for Strategic Studies just released, shows that over the past 20 years senior military officers have become both more partisan and increasingly aligned with the GOP. Asked in 1976 to identify their party affiliation, nearly half of the officers queried described themselves as independent. By 1996, the proportion had dwindled to 22 percent. Over the same period, the number of officers calling themselves Republicans doubled from 33 to 67 percent. Only seven percent considered themselves Democrats.

There are many possible causes for this trend. One may be the advent of the all-volunteer military in the mid-70s that, along with the Vietnam trauma, had the effect of making the self-selected military subculture even less ideologically representative of American society. And increasing affinity for Republicans was also fed by President Ronald Reagan's defense build-up in the 1980s, which restored the self-esteem of career soldiers who had hung on after Vietnam, and for which officers not illogically gave the Republicans most of the credit.

Reagan's impact was underscored when two prominent veterans—Air Force Captain Scott O'Grady and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell—took part in the 1996 Republican convention. O'Grady, the famous pilot shot down in Bosnia, appeared in a video tribute to Reagan, recalling (not altogether plausibly) that Reagan was the first person who wrote him after his rescue. "I know how much America's military meant to him," O'Grady said. "And of all the wonderful things that he did as president, the one I'll always remember is that he gave us back our pride, our strength, our spirit." Mustering all of his fighter jock's moxie, O'Grady rousingly concluded: "President Reagan, from all of us in the armed forces, we salute you."

Powell, who spoke after the video tribute, went even further: "For me, the soldier, Ronald Reagan will always be the president who restored the fighting strength and spirit of America's Armed Forces." Powell then affirmed at length his devotion to the Republican cause, which would "guarantee that our Armed Forces remain the strongest and most capable on earth."

In the context of a tribute to a widely admired and ailing former president, such statements might seem innocuous. But it was virtually unprecedented for former officers, let alone officers who had so recently left the service, to play such a prominent role in a partisan event, particularly one whose implicit—and, at times, explicit—message was that President Clinton, the erstwhile draft evader, was unfit to lead the country's armed forces. Former President George Bush, for example, pointedly noted that "there is no substitute for personal sacrifice, for courage, for honorable service," and that Bob Dole, "bloodied in combat" and "tested by fire on the battlefield," would be a "commander-in-chief whom our military respects." This kind of attack on a sitting commander-in-chief was extraordinary.

Not that O'Grady and Powell were the only prominent former officers making public political endorsements. During the run-up to the 1992 elections, former Marine Commandant P.X. Kelley appeared in ads for George Bush. That same year, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf questioned Bill Clinton's fitness for office because he evaded the draft. On the other side, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs William Crowe vouched for Clinton's suitability as president. A grateful president would later appoint Crowe ambassador to Great Britain.

But, for the most part, it is the Republicans who benefit from military endorsements—and they reciprocate. For example, "Military Readiness 1997," a report commissioned by GOP House National Security Chairman Floyd Spence, of South Carolina, sympathetically catalogues—and effectively validates—the grievances of service members on everything from the length of the duty day to the quality of child care. Spence laments the "increased bitterness" of soldiers and their families who are not only "having to do more with less" but "are also getting less." Message from the GOP: we care. Indeed, Spence and other Republicans back up that caring with budgetary largesse.

To be sure, concerns about declining military readiness, especially ominous signs that increasing numbers of talented, young soldiers are leaving the service, have a basis in reality. But the remedy lies in clarifying the present-day confusion over the structure and purpose of the American military establishment, not in promising to improve the "quality of life" of those who voluntarily wear the uniform. Indeed, to the extent that it legitimizes a market-oriented model for evaluating military compensation, GOP solicitude toward soldiers will only fuel expectations that cannot be met, thereby further undermining readiness.

This reciprocal relationship is certainly good for the Republicans: nothing helps at the polls like the hearty endorsement of a decorated veteran. And it may be good for the armed forces, too, in the myopic sense of protecting the current level of military spending. But over the long haul, a politicized military, not to mention one whose officer corps is so closely identified with one party, is both bad for the services and bad for democracy.

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Historically, politicization has usually been associated with military ineffectiveness. A great source of military weakness in the early days of the Republic was the way administrations chose officers based on their political affiliation, Federalist or Jeffersonian. Only by eventually divorcing itself from politics was the U.S. officer corps able to embark upon a protracted but ultimately successful process of professionalization. By the eve of the Vietnam War, aloofness from politics and noninvolvement in the compromises and deal-making that characterize democratic government had become hallmarks of military professionalism.

The victorious World War II-generation of officers was overwhelmingly nonpartisan. General George C. Marshall, for example, never even cast a ballot in any election while on active duty and pointedly let others know that he refrained from doing so. In Marshall's view, the mere act of voting—even by secret ballot—was inconsistent with officership. While Dwight Eisenhower ran for president after retiring from the service, he was apolitical until the day he took off his uniform. And even then his campaign was noteworthy for its relative lack of partisan fervor. (He had been courted by both parties before deciding to run.)

Marshall understood that the more the military becomes identified with one party, the more likely government officials and the voters are to perceive its recommendations as part of a political agenda—rather than the considered judgment of disinterested professionals. Within the military itself, partisan affiliation can jeopardize morale and, hence, effectiveness. If, for example, partisan views prompt soldiers to speak out for or against specific policies, this can only erode support among the troops for unpopular missions or those in which the U.S. national interest is unclear (such as Bosnia, Somalia, or Haiti, to name just a few deployments Republicans opposed).

At the same time, partisanship emboldens soldiers to take sides—even publicly to become advocates—on the great and controversial issues of the day, whether it's the prevalence of crime in the streets and the effectiveness of public schools, or gay rights and the character of the president. It engenders among soldiers (and some short-sighted civilians) dangerous notions that military institutions are morally superior to those of civilian life and that the armed forces may have a responsibility to save American society from its own decadent inclinations. Another name for the imposition of military ideals on the rest of society is, of course, militarism.

It is true that today the military believes it is under siege from civilian politicians—to some degree, politics has been thrust upon soldiers, and not vice versa. This has also been true from time to time in the past. But that's precisely why it's so important for military leaders to draw clear lines of proper behavior—lines that keep soldiers clear of partisan politics. Only the uniformed leadership can preserve the integrity of that hard-won professionalism, which is what transformed military service from a trade attracting more derision than respect into a higher calling. While George C. Marshall's forfeiture of his own right to vote may seem unduly high-minded today, few things could contribute more powerfully to preserving genuine military professionalism—or to insuring the health of American democracy—than for the officer corps to take his example to heart. •

Alec Baldwin's new role: the candidate.

THE BOYS ON THE BUS

By Stephen Glass

"Test 1, 2, 3, 4," Alec Baldwin says, clearing his throat. "Test 1, 2, 3, 4." The star of such films as *The Hunt for Red October* and *Glengarry Glen Ross* holds the microphone a few inches away from his mouth and stares at it with a sense of pride. "This bus has a microphone," he says to the few of us who have gathered to watch his debut into grassroots politics. Any minute now the charter bus will leave Manhattan's Bryant Park for western Massachusetts, where Alec is planning to drum up support for a statewide campaign finance reform initiative. "Alec is unlike many other celebrities," one of his publicity representatives tells me, referring to media reports that Alec may run for Congress. "He understands politics, he studies it hard.... He also really comprehends average Joes."

While I'm busy jotting that down, Alec continues with his inventory of the bus. He opens the door to the bathroom and remarks: "The bus has a bathroom." He sits down in one of the front row seats and stands up, his face aglow with wonderment: "It has comfy seats." And to his delight, he discovers over the next 20 minutes:

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"It has overhead lights."

"It has a place to store your bag above your head."

"It has a pouch where you can store things in front of your feet."

"It has armrests."

"It has tinted windows."

"This, this is so much better than a school bus."

Tapping the dashboard as the bus begins to move, Alec turns to the driver and asks, "How much does it cost?"

6:30 a.m.

Alec and some of his advisers are strategizing. They sit in the front of the bus, nibbling on bagels and drinking coffee. They talk about how many signatures they need to force an initiative on public financing for campaigns onto next year's ballot, and which shopping malls Alec will visit. Most of all, though, they talk about what today's trip "means." "We're not wasting a Saturday here for nothing," says one handler.

When Hollywood gets involved in politics, it must always "mean" something. Meaning is important because no one would want to watch a movie or a television series about any of the little events—fund-raisers, roll-call votes about obscure lines in the federal budget—that make up most of what goes on in politics. Or, when Hollywood does focus on the small events, it's because they symbolize something much bigger, say, Rosa Parks sitting in the front of the bus—small event, big meaning.

One of Alec's handlers suggests that this trip is like the Million Man March—lots of people in mass transit, going somewhere to say something. But no one else really likes the analogy: there are fewer than 100 people on board. Somebody proposes an alternative: the Freedom Rides. Both events, she says, are all about changing politics. Both also involve buses.

7:45 a.m.

Alec is suddenly alone—a perfect time to strike up a conversation about campaign finance reform. I'd rather ask him about his wife, actress Kim Basinger, or his new movie, *The Edge*, or even the time he was charged and later acquitted for attacking an overly intrusive member of the paparazzi. But Alec's publicity people, who called three reporters at the THE NEW REPUBLIC to pitch this story, say it's not that kind of profile. This is a political profile, which is the way I pitched it to my skeptical editors.

Alec, you see, is president of the Creative Coalition—an influential political organization of liberal celebrities founded by Ron Silver, Susan Sarandon, and Christopher Reeve. Alec also spends a lot of time fund-raising for Democratic Party candidates, and hanging out with politicians like Ted Kennedy and Newt Gingrich. All of this has, arguably, made Alec into Hollywood's most important political figure since Warren Beatty, although it seems Alec has set his sights even higher. In recent weeks, Alec's friends have told reporters that he wants to run for Congress—which would probably suit Alec just fine, as long as it isn't a supporting role: "Be one of 435 people down there in a Republican-controlled Congress? No," he told a *New York* magazine reporter. "What's the job I'd want to have? I'd say Senate." Even that may not be high enough billing: his sister Beth says the Baldwin family always thought Alec would someday be president.

Here on the bus, Alec's people have gone to great lengths to shore up their boss's credentials as a candidate. They have surrounded him with handlers: people to brief him on campaign finance reform, people to guide him to the right reporters, and, most important, people to make sure he looks like a politician playing an actor, rather than an actor playing a politician. At the center of this effort is Andrew Stengel, one of New York's wunderkind spin doctors. Stengel vows to me that Alec is not just a celebrity stiff. *Esquire* magazine said Alec "will not simply be a figurehead.... He will be an informed participant in the political process, dammit!" And his handlers tell me over and over again that Alec "understands the issues."

Eager to test my skepticism, I find Alec, much to my surprise, skimming through clips about the ins and outs of campaign finance legislation. Alec tells me that he is devoted to politics. There is plenty of evidence to support that. Alec doesn't just talk about rain forests and Tibet at the Oscars; he talks about even the boring issues, like campaign finance reform, and he talks about them on rainy mornings like today. Impressed, I ask how his initiative worked in Vermont, but before I can finish he begins to tell me about Brookhaven National Laboratory—the nuclear plant which is near his Long Island home, and, which he alleges, is leaking radioactive waste. "Every year, the radiation is coming closer to my home," he says. He shifts his feet, as if in retreat. All politics is local.

8:40 a.m.

Halfway to Massachusetts, Alec takes the microphone again. Campaign finance reform, he tells the busload of volunteers, is the issue that dominates all other issues. If the voters are wondering why they can't get sound environmental reform, he explains, it's because polluting industries give too much money to candidates.

A short, plump, graying man, who is obviously a veteran activist, raises his hand. "With all due respect, I think there is a negative in what you are saying," he tells Alec. Instead, we should say "campaign finance reform is vital to protect democracy and restore it to the people."

Alec stares at the man. This is supposed to be a monologue, but the audience has suddenly become a questioning electorate. Alec blinks—as if cutting the old man out of the scene—and closes with a visceral attack on the tobacco industry. "How long did tobacco buy into [Congress]?" he hollers into the mike. "The campaign donations bought the tobacco industry twenty years."

With his raspy voice and slicked, jet black hair, he

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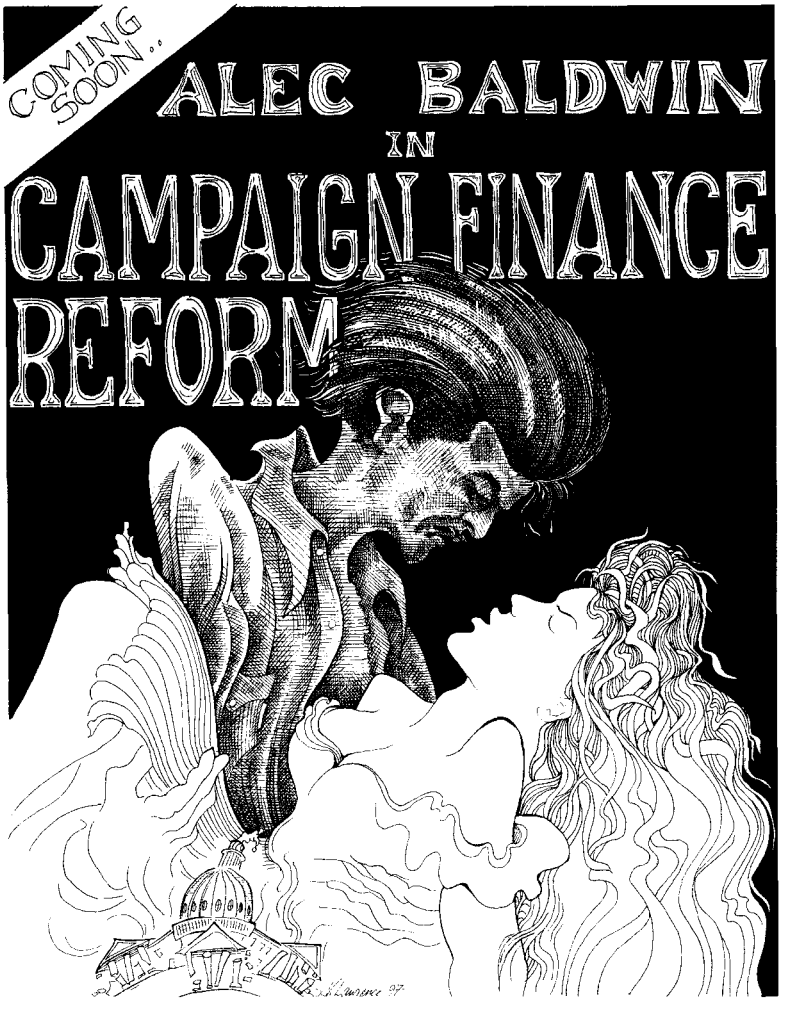
sounds and looks like a pure politician. Only later would I learn how much. Alec, it turns out, is on the cover of the current issue of *Smoke* magazine—a thick quarterly dedicated to "cigars, pipes, and life's other burning desires." In a five-page profile, stuffed with photos of him coolly lighting up, Alec brags about smoking up to five cigars a day. "Hey, I'm not gambling," he says. "I'm not smoking crack."

9:00 a.m.

We arrive at the Greek Cultural Center in downtown Springfield. Alec and his younger brother Billy—who starred in *Backdraft*—are scheduled to lead a pep rally for the hundreds of volunteers who have gathered in the hall. A cold drizzle has driven even the smokers inside, and, Alec, standing outside in a gray suit and sunglasses without a coat, blows on his hands to keep warm. The scene is not exactly what he had anticipated. His hair is damp from the rain, and he looks less glamorous than he did in *Prelude To A Kiss*.

Yet he warms to the part. His advisers assure him that in real life, unlike the movies, politicians wear coats, but Alec insists he doesn't need one. Even when a fan offers him a cheap plastic rain poncho, he demurs. Perhaps he can hear the faint din from inside.



DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

As he enters the cultural center, there are two parallel lines of fans waiting. They don't ask picky questions about policy like the people on the bus. They just chant: "Alec! Alec! Alec!" Alec works the room, shaking hands as he moves down the line, hugging strangers, mugging for the cameras, and giving an occasional thumbs up. Among the fans is six-month-old Alec Barkett, who—according to his mother—was named for her favorite actor. Alec kisses the baby, then announces to his press entourage: "I'm kissing babies! This looks bad—like I'm a politician." Alec obviously knows at least one thing about campaigning: to be a successful politician you must insist that you are not a politician at all.

9:30 a.m.

The ratio of autographs to petition signatures is about 25 to 1.

9:45 a.m.

Ray Fredricks is a skinny, freckled college sophomore with large glasses and a buzz haircut. He has studied campaign finance reform since high school and has worked on a dozen local campaigns to support public financing for elections, the solution favored by many experts. He is consumed with the minutiae of the issue. In his hands is a copy of *Buckley* v. *Valeo*, the 1976 U.S. Supreme Court case that found certain restrictions on campaign donations in violation of the First Amendment. He reread parts of it before Alec showed up—"to make sure I know my stuff when he gets here."

Fredricks fidgets nervously, rehearsing his question. Never before, he tells me, has a celebrity worked on the issue to which he has devoted himself. He feels confirmation that "someone like Alec understands the importance of campaign finance reform." More importantly, he believes Alec can do what almost no politician can: make enough people care about campaign finance reform to make Congress pass it.

When Alec emerges from a crowd, Fredricks pushes toward him. His question: How would you raise enough money to pay for publicly financed campaigns? Alec smiles and asks his name; he then takes Ray's pen and autographs his copy of the Supreme Court decision.

"To Ray,——Alec Baldwin"

"There you go," Alec says, as he turns to greet another fan.

10:00 a.m.

My editors have instructed me that they want more than just another *People* magazine piece that gushes over celebrity activism, so I ask Alec a substantive question about how the government should pay for public-

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funded campaigns. "It all comes back to Brookhaven," he says, perhaps only half hearing me. Trying to catch his attention again, I ask if most of the people are here to stargaze or to help the cause. Alec insists that he is incidental to the turn-out. If he had never shown up, all of the volunteers would still be here. I point out that almost half of them seem under the voting age of 18. That's not the point, Alec says, gesturing to a pack of high school seniors with whom he and his brother Billy have just spoken. "Those young people," he says, "are really interested in volunteering."

A few minutes later, I interview three 17-year-old girls—Katie Pierce, Ashley Taylor, and Dené Sarrette. Sarrette, who is wearing a T-shirt that reads GET BIG MONEY OUT OF POLITICS, says, "I asked [Billy] if he was married. When he said 'yes,' I said 'still?' He said 'yes.' So I asked him if he would party with me anyway tonight."

Why did she come to the event?

"I fantasize about Billy mainly."

What about campaign finance reform?

"Oh yeah. That too. I mean I don't dream about that. I dream about Billy, but [my teacher] told us about that. We were told we'd learn a lot."

What have you learned?

"Billy doesn't dress as well as Alec."

10:15 a.m.

I bump into Ray Fredricks leaving the rally. "I guess I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up," he says, still clutching his copy of *Buckley* v. *Valeo.*

10:20 a.m.

I find Stengel and ask when Alec plans on speaking about campaign finance reform. I tell him that I'm worried that I have come all the way up here and won't have a story. He reassures me and points to the stage where Alec is shouting out the names of every group that has shown up for the petition drive. Alec pumps his fist several times in the air, then leaves the stage while Mass Voters for Clean Elections explains the petition's details. Another reporter asks if this is "a movie opening or a rally."

To quell the growing skepticism among the press, Alec gets back on the stage and pleads for the crowd's help. "Some people in the media say you are only here to see me," he says. "Tell them it's not true...." They applaud wildly. He shoots the reporters an I told-you-so glance.

As soon as Alec walks off the stage, 14-year-old Jennifer Grenel runs up beside him while her friend snaps a picture. Grenel tells me she wants to hang the photo in her bedroom. I ask her about campaign finance reform. She looks at me with puzzlement. "I'm here because I'm pro-choice," she says.

11:00 a.m.

I am in a minivan, following Alec's car, with reporters from *Time* and *New York* and a photographer. We are headed for the Holyoke Mall. When we park, Alec's advance man runs ahead of the star and shouts to a Foot Locker employee and passers-by: "Hey, here comes Alec Baldwin! The movie star."

By the time Alec has found his way into the middle of the mall, dozens of fans are circling him. The Foot Locker employee is among the first to ask for his autograph. "Quite frankly, I'd like to have yours," Alec says, in what has become a familiar refrain. Looking suddenly sober, Alec asks them what they think of campaign finance reform. "I don't want you just to sign these forms," he says. "I want you to understand what you are signing." Many, though, aren't going along with the script, and Alec seems frustrated. One woman who signs is Darcy Beaulieu, the manager of Cinnamonster, a cinnamon-bun shop in the mall. Afterwards, I ask Beaulieu what the petition was for. "I really just came to get an autograph," she says. She then adds: it was for "something called, I think, Booksaven."

11:20 a.m.

After the adoring fans have been mobbing Alec for about 20 minutes, Chris Edmunds, of Chicopee, yells to Alec: "Where's your wife?"

"Toasty, home in bed, while I'm up here killing myself, Alec replies."

Edmunds then yells that his brother-in-law is a Los Angeles chiropractor who speaks highly of Basinger. Hearing this Alec stands up from the table and looks down at the man. He seems more agitated than he has been all day. "Do me a favor," he says, in a tone that could either be ironic or angry, "with all due respect, tell him to keep his hands off my wife." Alec then invites Edmunds to sign a petition.

Alec is beginning to look weary. He has been gathering petition signatures for almost 45 minutes now. He and his handlers decide it's time to break for lunch. The autograph-to-petition ratio has improved. It's now about 10 to 1.

12:20 p.m.

Outside, Alec kisses two more babies.

12:45 p.m.

The national press, which including me, comes to four people, is told to go to Caffeines, a nearby restaurant for a private conversation with Alec. Here, Stengel assures me, I will have plenty of time to get Alec's views on campaign finance reform. But after about a half-hour, Stengel calls to say that Alec is tired and "at the last minute" has gone back to the hotel.

By now, I have gotten the distinct sense that we're being ditched. Sure enough, the reservation was only made for four people. This is not surprising. Alec, like many other political celebrities, is wary of the press. Unlike politicians, celebrities are accustomed to softball interviews by celebrity journalists. (When *Harper's Bazaar* wanted to put Julia Roberts on its June cover, the editor let Roberts pick the writer: she chose movie director Billy Bob Thornton.) Political reporters, however, are paid to scrutinize. That's how they cover

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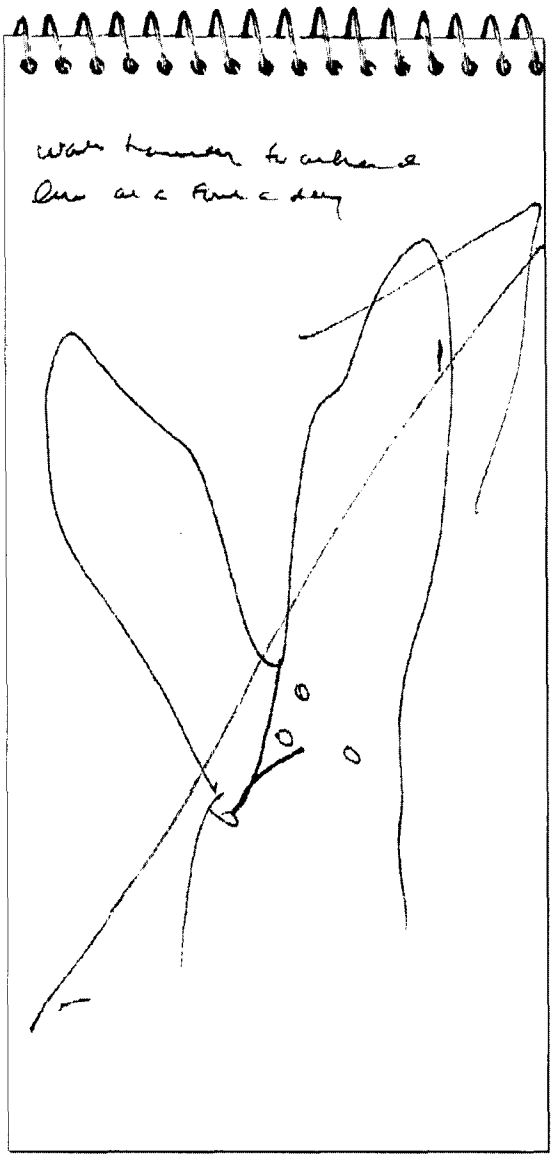
everyone. They see no need to cover celebrities who dabble in politics any differently from senators who dabble in acting.

I decide to take advantage of my free moment and use a pay phone to call Brookhaven. There is no one there, but a few days later I will find out that, yes, Brookhaven did recently have a radiation leak. I will also find out that, according to plant officials, the leak was fully contained on the lab's property; that the primary purpose of Brookhaven's nuclear plant is to provide power for non-military research; and that Brookhaven's nuclear research helps cancer patients. In fact, scientists at Brookhaven have won four Nobel prizes. Brookhaven officials say they have twice invited Alec to tour the plant himself, and make up his own mind about its safety. He still hasn't shown up.



ALEC BALDWIN'S SKETCH OF BROOKHAVEN

2:00 p.m.

After lunch, Alec begins to sense hostility among the reporters and decides to hold a brief press conference in the rain. "You could very easily walk away from this and write a piece and say, yeah, nine out of ten people said, 'Oh my God,' and they walked away with an autograph. But my attitude is that tenth person walked away with an understanding of the issue—and that's who we're after." Stengel nods at me, and I ask Alec if public financing of elections would violate the First Amendment—a complaint made by some campaign finance reform opponents. Alec shakes his head, takes the *Time* reporter's notebook, and draws a map of Long Island that shows ... *Brookhaven.* (See diagram.)

3:30 p.m.

After about 30 minutes, his tie loosened, his face slightly drawn, Alec says he's finished. Final autograph-to-petition ratio: approximately 20 to 1.

6:00 p.m.

Alec has found refuge in an office tucked away in the back of the building of the cultural center. I tell Stengel that I have almost no material on campaign finance reform and suggest, ever so gently, that my editors might be inclined to think Alec doesn't really know what he's talking about. Stengel encourages me to speak some more with Billy, who is thanking volunteers.

Billy looks like a thinner version of his older brother, with dark hair and a boxer's jaw. During a 15-minute conversation, I ask him if the current campaign finance hearings will spur reform and, if so, what kind of reform he would like to see. Without missing a beat, he tells me that the scandals are for the most part "crap." He then says the real scandal was in 1980, when soon-to-be Vice President George Bush allegedly went to Paris to delay the release of the hostages until Reagan had won the election. The now-disproven October Surprise is Billy's Brookhaven.

6:30 p.m.

I have given up on a campaign finance story, but Sharon O'Connell, who helped organize the event, tells me that I can meet privately with Alec. She leads me to a back room, where Alec is sitting hunched over the phone. "It's been such a grueling day," he says, rubbing his temples. "This has been the most exhausting day. I can't wait to just get to the hotel room and take a bath."

I wonder if he's talking to Kim Basinger, but I still have a list of about 20 questions on campaign finance reform. When he hangs up, I ask him if *Buckley* v. *Valeo* makes it harder to have real campaign finance reform. He says it was wrongly decided, then says something more about Brookhaven.

Finally, I ask him if the rumors are true: Is he going to run for Congress? He says he doesn't think so because he doubts that anyone would vote for him. Before Alec finishes the sentence the elderly woman who runs the cultural center bursts in. She asks him for his autograph. "You are my favorite," she says. "I would vote for you over anyone." For the first time all day, Alec looks at me with a smile. It is as if, through the rain and nagging questions and uninformed voters, he can finally catch a glimpse of the closing credits. "That," he says, "would be a perfect ending to your story." •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

A Stricken Town

Any film that provides Ian Holm with a large role is off to a good start. **The Sweet Hereafter** (Fine Line) gets off to that start and keeps going. Russell Banks's novel has been adapted by the director, Atom Egoyan, and—a pleasant surprise to one who hasn't been an Egoyan enthusiast—it has been done unsententiously, with no aesthetic preening. The novel was set in an Adirondack town; the film is set in British Columbia, possibly to help the financing in Egoyan's own country. Other than a change in accents, the move doesn't matter: what does matter is that Egoyan has "seen" the Banks story cinematically and has reshaped it adroitly—without altering the intrinsics. Banks told the story in five chapters, each written from one character's view. Egoyan has welded those chapters into a fluent whole, laced with essential flashbacks and accumulating in logical surprise.

The basic story is simple. One snowy morning a school bus, filled with children, skids off the road and into a lake. Most of the children are drowned. A big-city lawyer reads of the accident, goes to the town, and tries to enlist some of the bereaved parents in suits against the town, the bus manufacturer, and possibly others.

This story is the means by which the film travels; the point of the traveling is twofold. The first theme, present from the very start, is love of children. In the truest, least saccharine way possible, *The Sweet Hereafter* rives us with the pain of parents' loss. The film begins with a statement of parental love, an overhead traveling shot, exquisitely photographed, of three sleeping people, a young mother and father with an infant between them. Just because the picture is so lovely, we are shaken when we learn later who the three people are.

The second theme is the idea of community, small-town community. We saw this theme lately in *Nobody's Fool* with Paul Newman; here it is quickened by the intrusion of an outsider, the lawyer (Ian Holm). We see, before he even gets to the town, that he himself is tormented by parental troubles: his twentyish daughter is a druggie who phones him to taunt and terrify him when she needs money. This wound in his life is, in a bitter way, an advantage, not just with the stricken parents but with us.

He needs it, this character, just as he needs the taciturn dignity with which he conducts himself, because, despite his apparent professional success, in this story he is an ambulance-chaser. He has gone to this town to solicit clients—out of a humane impulse, no doubt, but he hasn't been invited. Indeed he has to convince the sufferers that they ought to bring suit, and he doesn't succeed with them all. The climax of the story rests with an eleven-year-old girl who has been maimed for life and who acquires her own view of the legal proceedings.

Hovering over the whole town is this ache, the loss of the children. For the parents, this ghastly accident has seized feelings that, in the nature of nature, had been taken for granted and has twisted them into anguish. (One father, no angelic type, had followed the school bus in his car every morning waving to his two kids who sat in the rear bus seat so that they could wave back. This man is the witness of the accident, helpless to do anything except summon aid that will arrive too late.) Egoyan, reticently and honestly, makes us feel that the whole town is haunted by lost loves.

His acute casting and gentle directing help to evoke something else that the town knew subliminally and now perceives: its kinship, heightened by the common tragedy. Particularly vivid among the actors are Bruce Greenwood as the tough father who used to follow the bus, Alberta Watson (who was the incestuous mother in *Spanking the Monkey*) as the motel keeper having an affair with Greenwood, Arsenée Khanjian and Earl Pastko as the "hippie" couple who adopted an Indian boy, Sarah Polley as the eleven-year-old, and Gabrielle Rose as the bus driver. Mild wonderment: at the end we see that she is a bus driver somewhere else. How did she get another job?

(Another mild wonderment: through much of the film Egoyan threads verses from "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." Some of the lines strike home, but in Browning's poem the children disappear because the town breaks its promise. No counterpart here.)

Then there's Ian Holm. We meet the lawyer conversing with his daughter on his carphone, then visiting the townsfolk, but some of the most evocative material is in a flashback on a plane

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Beaumarchais, the Scoundrel. *Rococo flurry in this account of the author of* The Barber of Seville *and* The Marriage of Figaro. *Never scintillating, frequently fun. (Reviewed 11/17/97).* **Boogie Nights.** *Paul Thomas Anderson's large treatment of a squalid subject, the making of porno flicks in L.A. in the 1970s. So intensely done that it touches currents beneath. (11/10/97).* **In the Company of Men.** *First-class. Modeled on Restoration comedy, it follows a cruel prank by two yuppies on a young woman—and the unexpected results. Sharp writing, directing, acting. (9/1/97).* **The Wings of the Dove.** *The two leading roles are well realized by Helena Bonham Carter and Linus Roache in this generally able version of Henry James's silky melodrama about death and inheritance. (12/8/97)*—**SK**

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en route to the town. By chance he is seated next to a young woman (acted with gentle verity by Stephanie Morgenstern) who was a schoolmate and friend of his daughter. Without really questioning him, merely by her quiet concern, and by his tacit jealousy of her compared with his daughter, she gets from him the dreadful story of his daughter's degradation—a story not yet finished, which he cannot stop and which he cannot help assisting. (How can he deny his daughter money when she needs it?) The writing and acting of those scenes on the plane add up to a Cheever short story in themselves.

Here and in his confrontations with the townsfolk, who are always initially hostile even if some of them become convinced about the lawsuit, Holm wins us with the way he uses his talent. He is not a florid actor, but he has learned how to make the most of his compact range. (How I would love to see the Lear which, I think, he is still playing in London.) He knows all that it is possible to know about a character he plays, and he manifests it through the personality of that character. No trickery or flash: just what every good actor achieves, reincarnation before our eyes.

The production designer, Phillip Barker, captures the wet-wool feel of wintry living. The cinematographer, Paul Sarossy, who has done three previous features with Egoyan, understands snow. This means a good deal more than knowing how to find all the colors in that seemingly solid white: Sarossy also understands the paradox of snow, its combination of confinement and liberation.

Recommended. Terry Eagleton's article in the *TLS* of October 31 on the current crop of film-script clichés. Witty, with some shrewd insight into the reasons for changes in the crop from time to time. Now, how about a collection of cinematic clichés? For instance, the helicopter shot of a car racing down a highway, included just because the helicopter was invented and the producer can afford to rent one. •

God, the future of American politics, and dieting.

America Image Disorder

By Margaret Talbot

It looked, for a long time, as if the New Age movement would leave politics alone. The moist spiritual questers, the troubadours of dysfunction, the adepts of aromatherapy, the crystal-gazers: surely they were too sunk into their innerspace to care about the sub-committees of Congress, too busy listening for their inner children to switch their frequencies to C-SPAN. Besides, for most adherents of the Human Potential movement, or the New Age movement, or the Recovery movement, the realm of politics is essentially, ontologically icky. It is the province of men led around by their logos and women trapped in their left brains, desiccated and dangerous rationalists every one. Tell a committed recoverer that there might be problems in the world more urgent than identifying the color of his parachute or the precise source of her "issues around owning her feelings," and you were likely to be thoughtfully reminded that you must deal with your own stuff before dealing with everybody else's. Besides, one's own stuff is a pretty spectacular quantity of stuff. The self is not easily appeased. It is jealous and demanding. Who, for instance, has taken the inner journey and not returned with a humbling awareness of all that needs to be done to the outer package? (One might turn one's Fitness Workout into a Quality Meditation, for example.) Anyway, we will not improve our politics until we have improved ourselves, right? And so the romp of narcissism might begin; and might never end.

Still, even as far back in New Age history as the late 1970s, there were rumblings of larger, more historical ambition. Werner Erhard told followers of Est to end world hunger by visualizing an end to world hunger. New Agers tend to prefer huge, imprecise abstractions with a timeless quality—"world hunger" or "world peace"—to more concrete and homely challenges such as "famine in Ethiopia" or "war in Bosnia." It is a way of having politics without policy. In the event, world hunger persisted; but the visualizers were not dissuaded. "Visualization" had demonstrated its personal efficacy—the visualizers felt so good about themselves—so its political efficacy was sure to follow.

The Healing of America
by Marianne Williamson
(Simon & Schuster, 366 pp., $24)

It took the baby boomer president, though, to bring the personal growth crowd straight to the world capital of power and denial. In 1994, as Bob Woodward later reported, Bill and Hillary Clinton hosted a retreat at Camp David for some of the giants of New Age thought, including the "peak performance coach" Anthony Robbins (he recommends walking on hot coals to strengthen the "souls" of the feet); Steven R. Covey, the effectiveness evangelist; Jean Houston, the woman who enabled Hillary Clinton to make Eleanor Roosevelt's acquaintance; and Marianne Williamson, the best-selling author of inspirational literature who, with her vaunted Hollywood connections and her tony good looks, may be the most glamorous spiritual counselor of them all. Now, in *The Healing of America*, Williamson has produced what might be the first manifesto of New Age politics. Her book is a diagnosis of what ails the nation and a prescription for making it better, or rather, for making it feel better.

And when you think about it, maybe the New Age turn to politics isn't so surprising after all. Politics, too, can be a mirror of the self, if you are determined to see it that way. ("The Western world is having an identity crisis," Williamson writes.) Besides, if you believe yourself gifted in mystical prophecy, as Williamson does, then why limit yourself to lecturing on body image and self-esteem? Why not think big? Eventually, the vexations of even such disciples as Elizabeth Taylor (Williamson officiated at her wedding to Larry Fortensky) and Oprah Winfrey (who sent Williamson's first book, *A Return to Love*, soaring into bestsellerdom after she told her studio audience that she had never before "been as moved by a book") must seem like small beer. When you can whisper, or channel, or exhort, or whatever, into a president's

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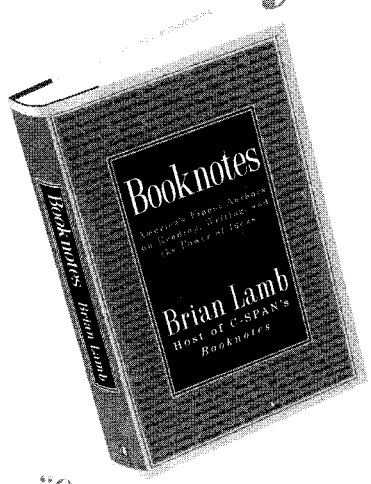

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Which author was interviewed for a presidential staff position in the White House barber shop?
See page 240

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ear, when you can declaim not just about "toxic" relationships but about an entire toxic nation, why hold your sacred fire?

As it happens, Williamson, who is neither an ordained minister, nor a credentialed therapist, nor a scholar of any kind, nor a person with much knowledge of politics or history, is nonetheless blessed with a powerful sense that her vision for America deserves attention at the highest levels. Indeed, "deserving" of all kinds is a favorite theme in her work. In *A Woman's Worth*, for instance, she defends what she describes as the justifiable longing of every adult woman for her birthright: "I *could* have been a mystical princess! I *should* have been a mystical princess! I was *supposed* to be a mystical princess!" You can almost hear the jangle of bracelets and beads as she stomps her slender foot and decides to order in.

The trajectory of Marianne Williamson has been short and steep, but not atypical in the world of the new American sages. In her midtwenties, she was, as she writes, "a total mess," a '70s kid who had tried all the mind-bending philosophies: "Eastern, Western, academic, esoteric. Kierkegaard, the I Ching, existentialism, radical death-of-God Christian theology, Buddhism and more." She found each of them wanting. (I'd kill for her critique of Kierkegaard.) She had lived on a commune in New Mexico, and she had seen her dream of becoming a cabaret singer in New York splutter out. Worse, she kept reverting to the same "patterns of self-betrayal"—screwing up at various jobs, gaining back the ten pounds she kept losing. There had to be a reason, and a profound one. As a young girl growing up in Houston, where her father was a successful immigration lawyer and her mother was a homemaker, Marianne had cast herself in world-historical roles. "I used to do a lot of pretending I was Eleanor Roosevelt," she told *People* magazine in 1992. (Even then her idea of mission had a certain Melrose quality: "I kept thinking, would make-up have made a difference?")

Then one day—there is always a "one day" in saints' lives—Williamson picked up a book that was lying on someone's coffee-table. A lot of people would have put it right back down. The book in question was *A Course in Miracles*, surely one of the most extraordinary documents in the recent history of popular religion in America. It is a narcotizing contemporary gospel entirely devoid of parables, exempla, or concrete language of any kind, and larded instead with vatic, psychologizing incoherencies. It is the Bible as the folks at Hallmark would have written it, except that it is not, to put it mildly, pithy. ("When you feel tired, it is because you have judged yourself as capable of being tired. When you laugh at someone, it is because you have judged him as unworthy. When you laugh at yourself, you must laugh at others, if only because you cannot tolerate the idea of being more unworthy than they are.") Though *A Course in Miracles* had the look and feel of a sacred text—the deep blue cover with gold lettering, the mysterious capitalizations, the chapters and the verses, the fluttery, hymnal-like pages, nearly 500 of them—its origins are rather more pedestrian. In 1968, Helen Schucman, "the one who received the material," as the introduction describes her, was a professor of medical psychology at Columbia University. She had a fight with the chairman of her department—this is what passes for the desert, I guess—at the end of which he concluded with a sigh that "there must be another way." For some reason, Schucman took this offhand comment as her cue to start furiously channeling from a higher source. Soon thereafter she began receiving the dictations from a mysterious voice, and these dictations comprise the Course. "Apparently," she notes with an odd complacency, "this Course is the other way."

Williamson sparked to its revelation, and in the early 1980s she began leading workshops in which she offered her glossalia on the Course to the would-be pilgrims of West Los Angeles. In 1992, she published *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles in A Course in Miracles*; Oprah bought 1,000 copies and plugged it on her show, and Williamson's shimmery career as author, lecturer, and supermodel for the soul was launched. Just a few years later, she had published two more bestsellers (*Illuminata: A Return to Prayer*, and *A Woman's Worth*) and produced a shelf-load of inspirational audiotapes. The theme of her instruction was, in essence, boosting your self-esteem and your body image through the love of God. The tapes featured Marianne herself uttering soothing, if somewhat achievement-oriented prayers ("Dear God, My talents are not used as I wish . . . My energies are so suppressed/ Dear Lord, I do not know how to break free of the ways I constantly negate myself") over the plink-plink of synthesized strings and the burble of unidentified waters, upon which many Americans were now casting their bread. She had a Website, a glitzy Hollywood discipleship, an invitation to the White House.

In Williamson's teachings, there are a few central axioms of faith. The central premise, taken from the Course, is that

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Literally, the sky's the limit

The Kyoto Conference: More than hot air?

Politics in the Greenhouse

Preparations for the Conference on Climate Change held in Kyoto, Japan illustrate how governments putter about the edge of global problems while ignoring fundamental issues.

The central issue here is that population growth drives greenhouse gas emissions.

Caught in a Bind

Most scientists agree that we must burn significantly less fossil fuel worldwide to stabilize or decrease concentrations of the greenhouse gases responsible for global climate change.

However, few countries are willing to reduce emissions by meaningful amounts.

Delegates to Kyoto are under extreme pressure not to sign any agreements that could possibly slow their country's economy, or appear to give other countries any advantage. They are concerned about how their nations can provide enough food and energy for their populations. And in all but a handful of countries, population figures are going through the roof.

Big Numbers

For example, India, currently 950 million, is expected to grow to 1.4 billion by the year 2025. Africa's population will double to 1.5 billion by that date. Mexico's will grow from today's 95 million to135 million.

World carryover stocks of grain – the amount of food remaining in storage just before harvest – would now last less than 60 days. Rising population and climate changes will reduce global food security even further, threatening social chaos.

Not just the developing world

European nations and Japan have almost stabilized their populations. But the United States – responsible for 20% of all greenhouse gas emissions – is expected to grow to 330 million in 2025, on its way to 400 million by 2050 if current trends continue.

Sustainability

To pretend that global warming can be averted in the face of continuing population growth is absurd. ***Like every other environmental issue***, the problem cannot be resolved until world population growth is halted, reversed, and stabilized at a sustainable level lower than today's.

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the entire physical world—and consequently all pain, suffering, disease, and death—is an illusion, the product of mistaken perception. Guilt, punishment, and judgment are all to be avoided. Indeed, they are unnecessary, because sin is not real. Call it Christianity Lite; for though the Course appeals to Christ's teachings, its one consistent thread is the assurance that nobody ever does wrong, that the very ideas of sin and punishment are just a way to cloud your mind and bum you out. "Sin is the home of all illusion," intones Schucman / the mysterious voice, "which but stands for things imagined, issuing from thoughts that are untrue." The Course takes a sort of Ayn Randish view of the supremacy of the self (Lesson 253: "My Self is ruler of the universe. It is impossible that anything should come to me unbidden by myself"), which Williamson slightly softens. As in Christian Science, sickness is seen as entirely a creation of the mind—"a decision," as the Course calls it—"not a thing that happens to you, quite unsought, which makes you weak and brings you suffering." And miracles are your right. It was inevitable, in this America, that salvation would become a matter of rights, an entitlement. Lesson 77 of the Course is called "I am entitled to miracles," and it concludes: "I only want what belongs to me. God has established miracles as my right." Judgmental attitudes, as Williamson says, are pathologies that you probably contracted from bad parenting, and you had better pray that you can shed them. Fear gets in your way. There is only one thing that will set you on the right path. It is love.

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

None of this feel-good farrago is very new. *A Course in Miracles* and Williamson's interpretation of it both belong to the American tradition of spiritual self-help of which Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* was perhaps the apotheosis. One way or another, in this genre that Richard Hofstadter called the "cult of religious practicality," faith is a purely instrumental matter, a promise of quick relief, a means of manipulating the self in the interest of worldly advancement and a clear (or perhaps an empty) conscience. It is no coincidence that the first crop of these books appeared in the late nineteenth century, as American capitalism was consolidating itself. The contrast with the Puritan doctrine of the calling, as Hofstadter showed, could not have been sharper. For the Puritans, "diligence in business was one of the ways of serving God. Success or failure in business might then be a clue as to an individual's spiritual condition. But over the years, this relationship gradually became reversed. The distinction between service to God and service to self broke down. Whereas business had been an instrument in religious discipline, one of the various means of serving God, religious discipline now became an instrument in business, a way of using God to a worldly end."

In Peale, this utilitarian approach devolved into parody—belief in God and the confidence that it affords you was not only supposed to make you rich and well-liked, it was supposed to spiff up your golf game, too. In Williamson and in *A Course in Miracles*, the objective of faith—guilt-free self-actualization and burnished good health—is also a worldly end, though a more grandiose one. And its attainment ought not to be too taxing. "Five minutes spent with Him in the morning (doing the workbook or any other serious practice of prayer or meditation)," Williamson writes, "guarantees that He will be in charge of our thought forms throughout the day." Or as the actress Theresa Russell described Williamson's teachings to *People* magazine, "You don't have to give up your whole existence in order to lead a spiritual life. You can be 'semi-enlightened.'" If you're only semi-enlightened, though, why claim to be enlightened at all? Why not just muddle through like the rest of us, trying to be as decent as you can without surrendering your brains, and spurning, on the grounds of candid self-knowledge, the terrible cloak of purity?

It might be argued that, applied to the personal realm, all this stuff is pretty harmless. Anyway, it seems to speak to millions of people, and they seem to find real comfort in it; and one must have some respect for the problems and the solutions of so many people. Still, respect for the ordinary can easily wither into condescension. It is not an expression of respect to sit back and watch others be taken for a ride. So it is a citizenly duty to remark upon the nonsense in these popular panaceas.

For a start, there is a kind of ersatz universalism in Williamson's books. She generalizes from her own sorry self, and is trapped within the rather peculiar limits of her imagination. Thus she says that "every woman I know" wants to be a glorious queen or a priestess or a mystical princess. But what woman really wants to be such a thing, any more than she wants to be a griffin or a giant kitty-cat? Williamson decks out Jungian archetypes to look like Stevie Nicks. And she orders and classifies the world into absurdly stereotyped feminine and masculine qualities: "The masculine is active, the feminine passive; the masculine is dynamic, the feminine magnetic. The masculine *does*, while the feminine *is*."

Williamson also has a penchant for

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hyperbole, especially in describing the self-doubt, the struggles with dieting and the bad breakups that plague the affluent boomers she knows; and this rhetorical inflation renders many of her assertions meaningless when they are not downright offensive. "Womanhood is a mass pain of unspoken depth." "Most women today are borderline hysterical." "Our generation has slipped into a barely camouflaged vortex of self-loathing." Where is the evidence for any of these pronouncements about entire genders and generations? Or: "We are tyrannized by a belief that we are inadequate. No Nazi with a machine gun could be a more tormenting presence." Oh, come on. Hasn't she seen *Schindler's List*?

She often scrambles her metaphors beyond recognition. "We are numb to our own creative juices. No one held a space for our gorgeousness, and now we can't find it," she writes of all women. "We were like lava channelled into plastic molds." (Wouldn't the lava have melted the plastic?) But it is what Williamson says, and not how she says it, about which all Americans must be warned. Consider Williamson's faith in the healthy body as an emblem of virtue. In this, there is evidence of a disturbing moral vision. If bad thoughts cause AIDS or cancer, if "disease is loveless thinking materialized," then people who contract these illnesses are at least partly to blame. I ardently hope that this is not the message she conveys in her work with AIDS patients. (Williamson has started two so-called Centers for Living, which offer various kinds of support—counseling, massage services, housecleaning—to people with HIV.) This twisted view certainly animates her creepiest bit of advice, which is that AIDS patients write letters to the virus. She provides models for such letters in *A Return to Love*. In Williamson's world, of course, the virus writes back:

> Dear Steve,
>
> If I was, as they say, out to get you, don't you think you'd be dead by now? I'm not able to kill, harm, or make you sick, I have no brain, brute strength or great harming force. I'm just a virus. You give me the power you should give to God... Yes, I live off your fears. But I die from your peace of mind, serenity, honesty, faith and desire to live. Sincerely, the AIDS virus.

And, even more bathetically (and insidiously: note the way in which the unfortunate addressee's justifiable anger at his illness is censured), the virus "writes" yet again:

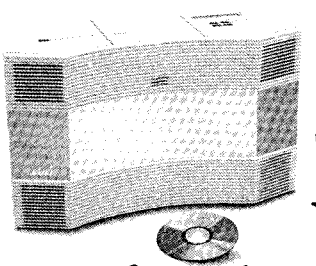
> I don't mean you and your loved ones any harm. I'm just trying to exist, just like you, doing it the best way I know how. Unfortunately, it ends up hurting people. I just want to love, just like you do.... Maybe if we try listening to each other and talking to each other, we can find a way to exist in peace without hurting each other. Right now, I feel like you only want to destroy me rather than dealing with whatever it is inside of you that brought me here.

Inside of *me*? Well, thanks, Mr. AIDS Virus, but you can go fuck yourself. Sincerely....

It is not only grave illness that marks a person as hopelessly out of touch with his "issues," that expels him or her from the circle of enlightenment. Williamson has an unbelievable obsession with fat, so that even in the same chapter in which she decries the fashion industry and the movie industry for "not loving us" and for making women feel inadequate, she is explaining that minor pudginess—that spare tire, those ten pounds—is a moral problem, and the "ego's way" of keeping us "separate" from other people and from God. Even when she is cooing that it's the inner light that matters, the spirit and not the body, she is assuring us that getting sacred is, by the way, a splendid dieting technique. (And, just maybe, a way to keep looking youthful, too: "I read somewhere that the Virgin Mary never aged, although she lived into her fifties.")

Williamson rarely tells vivid stories of any kind, but she does lavish horrified attention, in *A Woman's Worth*, on the unfortunate creature whom she once sighted in line at a 7-11. "She was fat, at least fifty pounds overweight. Her hair was bleached blond. She was buying copies of *The Globe* and the *National Enquirer*, a bag of peanuts and a huge prepackaged cookie." Williamson doesn't say what *she* was buying, the range of wholesome, un-prepackaged fare at 7-11 not being that great, but never mind. She "felt" the bleached blonde's "misery." (This would be—what exactly? The misery of bad taste?) Later she said a prayer for her, which included the line, "It is God's will that we be beautiful." It is quite a fall from the woman at the well to the woman at the 7-11. But there is hardly a page in Williamson that is not an insult to the reader's (also the religious reader's) intelligence.

To all of this, of course, the disciples would reply that I just don't get it, that I am in denial, that I am marooned at an immature stage in my spiritual development, that I am turning my back to the light. And that would be that. On the affairs of the spirit, it would be their word against mine. But the affairs of politics are quite another matter. When Williamson writes a book such as *The Healing of America*—a book purporting to offer a broad political vision in which she wants



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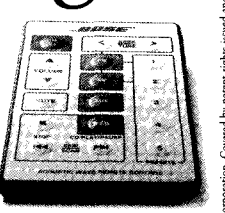

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to enlist pretty much everybody—she must make sense to the wayward and the unconverted.

To the wayward and the unconverted, I'm afraid, there is much in Williamson's books that seems downright illiberal, even anti-democratic. In this pious book, you will find a delegitimation of judgment and a delegitimation of conflict; a promiscuous intermingling of the personal and spiritual realms with the public and political realms; a dalliance with conspiracy theories; and a distrust of rationality and the intellect that would make democratic deliberation meaningless. Williamson is caring and inclusive and pained and tender-hearted and intensely concerned about children and the poor; but her prescriptions for politics give compassion a bad name.

Consider, for example, the stigmatization of judgment that is at the heart of the book. "Pray for help," Williamson advises, "in giving up judgment toward whatever person in public life, or group of people, you tend to judge." Differences of opinion must not be honored, or engaged, or resolved by means of logical proof and empirical evidence. They must be healed. She calls her book *The Healing of America*, appealing to the most commonplace and the most confusing metaphor in America today. Williamson speaks again and again of "the ladder of healing" and its many rungs. This metaphor from medicine was long ago embraced by religion (as in "faith healing"). "There is in each of us a reservoir of divine power," she writes. "Liken this power to a Divine Physician within you. Call it God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Jewish *shekina*, the Atman, the Oversoul, non-violence, universal love, whatever words you wish." And again: "Politicians can be likened to doctors." Yet this metaphor must vigilantly be kept away from politics, because it fails sufficiently to dignify the difficulties, it promises either death or a cure, and it is redolent of the miraculous.

In a democratic society, there are times when reasonable people should agree to disagree. Not every problem has a simple or clear solution, even if the problem hurts. Not every solution goes with every other solution. There are conflicts that are worth keeping alive, because there are principles at stake in them, and because people ought to be held accountable for their deeds. (The doctrine of all-embracing, unconditional love that Williamson upholds does not do justice even to love, I mean to real love. "A love that does not discriminate seems to me to forfeit a part of its own value, by doing an injustice to its object," Freud once wrote. "If I love someone, he must deserve it in some way.") Are we to pray when we engage in politics? All right, then, let us pray. But my prayer will be rather different from Williamson's. My prayer will be, please do not deliver us from judgment of ethnic cleansers in Bosnia, or agents of apartheid in South Africa; and please strengthen our resolve to bring them to justice.

Even shaping policy on less dramatic issues sometimes means engaging in fierce arguments and partisan activities. "Not enough people in America today have access to the tools—education, job training, child care, mass transit," Williamson observes. "We are told that these are things we cannot afford. That excuse is a lie. We are not providing those universal tools because we do not yet have a critical mass of the American electorate who are willing to stand for the notion that we should." Well, maybe. I appreciate Williamson's general sense of priorities, but her advice is really a counsel of cynicism. For in a world of finite resources, somebody has to decide *where* to get the money for such things and *how* to balance one social good against another social good. All the purity of soul in the world won't make it otherwise. "There are those who say that to run a country with love in mind is not practical," Williamson writes. "But the argument that love is not practical is but a smokescreen. Of course, it is not *practical*. But what is practical? No one is saying that love is practical, but only that it is *good*." Now *that* is but a smokescreen.

Williamson is so chary of assigning responsibility for bad policies to actual people—she prefers to impute our malaise to a vague miasma of "fear-based" thought and the profit motive—that her descriptions of how politics works sound completely denatured, as though campaigns and elections and legislative debate all took place on some astral plane. "Politics as we know it now is a materially based process focused through dense, fear-laden consciousness," she writes. Huh? And the enemies of progress are painted so starkly that no real person is in danger of recognizing himself in her rogue's gallery. "Those who couch political debate as merely 'your needs and desires vs. my needs and desires'—with no respect for America's need to balance individual liberty with the common good—bring down the political process." Well, sure, but who would those reprobates be? Such an approach makes taking a stand sound childishly simple: all you have to do is promise to cut out the really beastly stuff. "Every time a screenwriter says, 'No, I won't write a script in which the woman gets cut up into little pieces and the restaurant full of people gets blown away by a sixteen-year-old blonde bombshell carrying an Uzi, even if you do pay me $300,000,' conscience takes an economic stand," Williamson declares, warming to the struggle. "Any time a lawyer says, 'I won't let you buy my services so you can find a way to legally exploit old and feeble people out of their life savings,' conscience takes an economic stand." *Aux armes*, grasping screenwriters and skanky lawyers!

Conscience never had it so easy. More distressing than any of this, however, is Williamson's persistent devaluing of rationality. This takes many forms, none of them particularly salutary for democracy. Her dumbing down of history is the least of it. She just doesn't know very much. ("Historian Arthur Schlesinger has pointed out that Americans become involved in politics every thirty years.") Williamson loves the Founding Fathers, which is very nice. In her version, though, they sound more like her own generation of protestors than they do like their own: "a group of young Americans who stood up to the most powerful military force in the world and said, 'No, We have a better idea' "—you remember, those lovers of liberty in their powdered wigs and breeches who looked at life from both sides now. But it is her contrast of the Founding Fathers (good, pure of heart) with the Industrial Revolution (bad, materialistic) that really gives one pause. "By the beginning of the 20th century, attention to the soul had been marginalized by a materialistic focus sweeping across the plains of America's consciousness like a windstorm that wouldn't stop," she writes, with more fervor than sense. The culprits here are Newtonian physics and the Enlightenment, whose noxious rationalism Our Founders somehow managed to rise above. (Never mind that they actually drew heavily upon them.)

It doesn't bode well for a politics that it must deride the laws of physics. In Williamson's account of American history, America has long suffered from a dearth of faith, an insufficient interest in the soul. (Never mind that the United States has been, and still is, the most religious of all the Western democracies, a riot of religion. But it is one of the dogmas of the New Age that religion has little or nothing to do with spirituality.) Fortunately, though, all this is about to come to an end, by means of a process that Williamson leaves delicately draped in mystery. "Every corner of God's universe is being swept upward, as the door to a new millennium offers escape from the lower regions of thought still tugging so strongly and destructively at us,"

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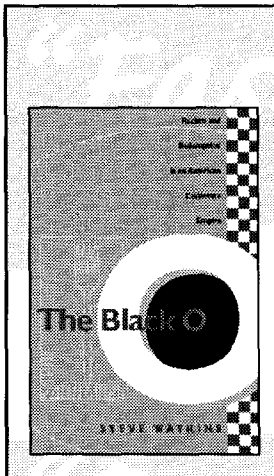
she prophesies. "We are exiting a Material Age, which has lasted for thousands of years, and are entering an Ideational Age. We are, as a species, shifting our focus from extrinsic to intrinsic value." Thousands of years? Were the Middle Ages extrinsic and unideational?

Williamson sees in "the Internet communications revolution" the promise of a society no "longer limited by strict and rationalistic materialism." This is baffling. Williamson often uses "materialism" as a synonym for capitalism, but the Internet is certainly no capitalist-free zone. She seems not to realize that she is just another Microsoft messianist. And if she is contending that computers represent a triumph over rationalism, then she has more explaining to do. What does she think goes into all that circuitry, archetypes? Maybe she means only that the Internet is another place where New Age ideas can be disseminated, but then that's no guarantee of their hegemony. Elsewhere Williamson explains the coming shift as an "explosion from the deepest levels of the psyche" and a phenomenon over which we have no control. Which begs the question, why construct a politics at all? Though Williamson seems to want to encourage political participation, and at times she even suggests such humble methods as writing to your congressman, these civics lessons are dwarfed by her Dolby millennialism, by the specter of epochal shifts beyond our control.

Anyway, Williamson keeps revealing her preference for what are essentially symbolic, mystical, and personal forms of political action. "If enough people read the same article and think the following thought: *This should not be happening in America; I am committed to this not happening in America*—then that alone contributes to a new vortex of power." Or: "*Our* meditations, *our* personal growth work, *our* prayers, *our* healing, *our* need to forgive and withhold judgment are the things we must concentrate on first in seeking to transform the world." In such a view, politics is the handmaiden of the inner life and the inner life is the handmaiden of politics, and both maidens seem diminished by the relationship. Williamson turns democracy into a technique of levitation. She has the temerity to tell us that what we need more of in politics is "the stuff of magic and magical people." She might pause to reflect that the only modern governments that have been comfortable incorporating magical thinking—oracles, astrology, the occult—into politics were fascist governments, which always prefer charisma to law, and ecstasy to decency.

When Williamson writes about race and gender, her occult essentialism gets the best of her, leading her into strangely blood-and-soilish declarations about the historical memories entwined in our genes. "There is in modern Western woman," she writes, "a cellular memory of burning at the stake, just as there is in modern American blacks a cellular memory of slavery." Naturally, this leads to the idea of praying for "racial atonement." For if all African Americans, past and present, are in possession of the same cellular memories, then so are all white Americans. Cellular memory would be the kind of history over which we could achieve no mastery, an enslaving form of collective memory that would keep us forever mired in the past and in our own archaic feelings about it. But hey, the *Course* defines "atonement" as "undoing." So, no prob. We will pray the past away. And we can also apologize it away. "The nation now debates whether or not Congress should officially apologize for slavery. For those Americans who think that blacks need to just forgive slavery and move on with their lives, I would like to point out that it is much easier to forgive someone when they have had the courtesy to apologize." It does not occur to Williamson that an apology for something that one has not oneself done is the surest way of degrading the idea of



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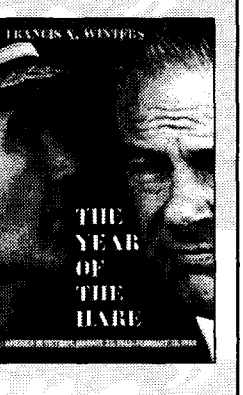

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responsibility. But Williamson's notion of America's race problem is altogether a vaporous one. "This is not about money, but atonement. Money will not solve America's problems; only spiritual power will do that." Tell that to the Congressional Black Caucus.

One of the odder byways onto which Williamson wanders is the matter of TWA Flight 800. Williamson subscribes to the theory, widely circulated on the Internet, that the plane was shot down by friendly fire from the American military. She has no evidence, of course. She knows only that "serious journalists" deny it. And for journalists—the people who might actually uncover a conspiracy, if there were one to uncover—Williamson has nothing but contempt. In her account, reporters wake up every morning wondering "Who can I destroy today, possibly winning myself a Pulitzer, without leaving town or doing real work?" The media tells us nothing we need to know, she contends. "But we *all* know this: Gwyneth Paltrow and Brad Pitt *broke up*!!!!!!!"

In fact, no solid evidence to support the friendly fire theory has ever surfaced, and the FBI and the NTSB have refuted it again and again. It's not that the Pentagon could not lie, or would not lie; but there are ways to prove or to disprove its assertions. The point is that Williamson lives in a world that has transcended proof. Why wouldn't such an abdicated mind ally itself with conspiracy theorists? Yes, she concedes, Flight 800 might have crashed as the result of a faulty wiring to the fuel tank, but because that fault may have been due to penny-pinching on the part of the airlines, the result is the moral equivalent of friendly fire. "Either way, are you happy?" she asks.

"Are you happy?" That is the quintessential Williamsonian question. It is also, alas, the question that more and more politicians ask, when they ask for a vote. It is a shallow, demagogic question. It is a question that robs politics of its gravity, that transforms complicated matters into simple matters, that demotes ethical situations into emotional situations, that demands to know only your price. So never mind my happiness. There are more troubling, and obscure, and difficult problems facing the nation. And there is not a prayer that any one of those problems will be adequately addressed unless we stay clear-headed and sober and skeptical, unless we demand to know what words and actions really mean, unless we are ready for compromise and an unenchanted life of progress by means of partial disappointment. Otherwise, not a prayer. •

Walter Benjamin's long, limited view.

One-Way Street

By Michael André Bernstein

In September 1915, the journal *Der neuer Merkur* published an essay on "The Life of Students" by Walter Benedix Schönflies Benjamin, a twenty-three year old university student from a prosperous and thoroughly assimilated Jewish family in Berlin. The German Youth Movement had succeeded in attracting national attention to its demands for educational reform and "spiritual renewal," but it is unlikely that the journal's readers were prepared for this young man's hieratic tone, or for the sweeping self-confidence of his assertions. Here is how "The Life of Students" opens:

> There is a conception of history that puts its faith in the infinite extent of time and thus distinguishes only the speed, or lack of it, with which people and epochs advance along the path of progress. This corresponds to a certain lack of context, want of precision, and strictness of demand, which this conception places on the present. The following remarks, in contrast, consider a definite condition in which history appears to be concentrated into a single focal point, like those traditionally found in the utopian images of the thinkers. The elements of the ultimate condition do not manifest themselves as a formless tendency towards progress, but rather are deeply rooted in every present as the most endangered, most disparaged and derided creations and thoughts. The historical task is to disclose this immanent state of perfection and make it absolute, to make it visible and dominant in the present. This condition cannot be delineated through a pragmatic description of details (the history of institutions, customs, and so on) ... it can only be grasped in its metaphysical structure, as with the Messianic Kingdom or the idea of the French Revolution. It is worth taking the trouble to describe the contemporary historical significance of students and the university ... only if they can be understood as a metaphor, as an image of the highest metaphysical state of history ... all that remains is to consciously liberate the future from its deformations in the present. This is criticism's sole task.

Michael André Bernstein teaches literature at the University of California, Berkeley and is the author, most recently, of *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (University of California Press).

By the time this text appeared, its author had already acquired a reputation for earnest, bookish intensity. In spite of his prickliness and his fastidiousness, he was an important figure in the student movement, and was twice elected president of the Free Students' Association at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin. Indeed, a few months earlier, in June 1915, he had presented some of the same ideas as part of a lengthy intervention at a public discussion also attended by Gerhard (later Gershom) Scholem, who had just turned eighteen, and who testified, decades later, to the powerful impression that Benjamin immediately made on him.

Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume I, 1913-1926
edited by Marcus Bullock
and Michael W. Jennings
(Harvard University Press, 520 pp., $35)

Walter Benjamin: A Biography
by Momme Brodersen
translated by
Malcolm R. Green and Ingrida Ligers
(Verso, 334 pp., $35)

Benjamin's Crossing
by Jay Parini
(Henry Holt, 306 pp., $23)

To encounter Benjamin's piece is like overhearing the opening notes of one of the most intellectually compelling friendships of our century. It is greatly to the credit of Harvard University Press to have made the text finally available to English-speaking readers. In general, the editors of this volume have made an exemplary choice of what to include, and when their projected multi-volume selection is complete, it will constitute the most important compilation of Benjamin's writings outside the mammoth German *Collected Works*. This first volume contains such major pieces as the long essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, enthusiastically published by Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1924-25; but the generous sampling of Benjamin's earliest writings, much of it translated here for the first time, is invaluable in its own

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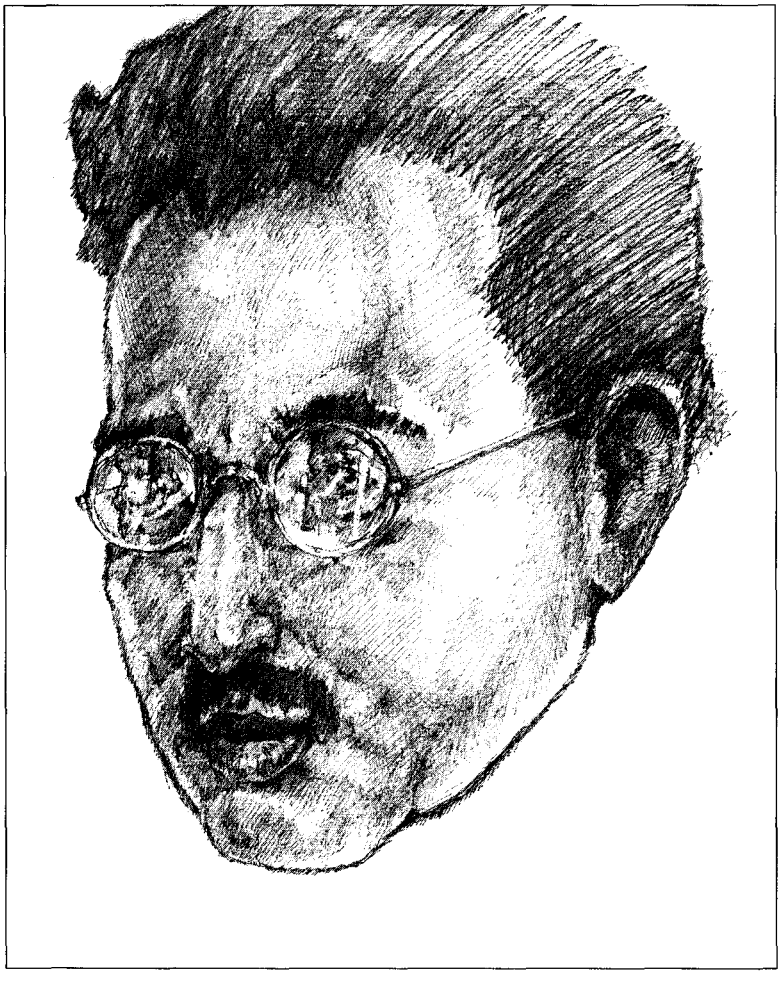
right for what it reveals about Benjamin's intellectual genealogy.

For all their clotted syntax and their conceptual opacity, the questions taken up in early texts such as "Experience," "The Metaphysics of Youth," and "Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin" are remarkably consonant with Benjamin's mature concerns, and reading these prewar pieces confirms how dubious is the conventional division of his thinking into phases. Though they flaunt the scholasticism of the library and the self-entangling jargon of the philosophical debating society, it is not so much the theoretical "difficulty" of Benjamin's early works that makes them so off-putting, it is rather their bewildering combination of probing insights and embarrassing commonplaces, all cloaked in the identical rhetoric of tortuous abstraction. Every phrase seems burdened with the pressure of never articulating anything less than an all-encompassing categorical perception, and whole paragraphs palpably buckle under the strain. The same unsteadiness resonates just as troublingly in much of Benjamin's mature work, and helps to explain why so many of his projects remained incomplete.



WALTER BENJAMIN BY DAVID SCHORR FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Even a slight essay such as "The Life of Students" is already dense with the specific preoccupations—and even some of the vital formulations—that would obsess Benjamin throughout his life. Most strikingly, there is the insistence on two radically incommensurate conceptions of history: the first, which he evokes only to dismiss, is gradualist, evolutionary, and unsystematic; the second is utopian, absolutist, and metaphysical, and it commands all of Benjamin's passionate allegiance. For him, it is the exceptional events, the apocalyptic moments, that matter. Only they contain sufficient depth of meaning to illuminate the present.

What Benjamin will later call "homogeneous time," that is, time as sheer duration, is empty of significance. Instead, to contemplate the disruptive and the singular in the past is regarded as the sole way of seizing the inner truth of one's own historical moment. It follows from such an assumption that any attempt to ameliorate that moment by piecemeal reform is trivial and even dangerous, since nothing short of an all-encompassing transformation, the bringing to fruition of an "immanent state of perfection," makes any significant difference. For the intellectual, the true task is to fashion something like a metaphysical still life, a crystallization in which history itself, as a kind of absolute, hypostatized subject, is suddenly made visible, "concentrated into a single focal point ... [as] in the utopian images of the thinkers."

These are sentences that could just as easily have been heard at a philosophical seminar in any German university in 1810. It is the language of Schelling, Schlegel, Novalis, and Fichte that gives Benjamin his central tropes, and the longings of German Idealism, not the situation of a student body facing imminent annihilation in the trenches of the First World War, that determine his argument. As in Benjamin's invocation of "the *idea* of the French Revolution," it can take seriously only the distilled theoretical residue of an occurrence, not any messily concrete course of events.

Since Benjamin subsequently did seek to give his yearning for a "Messianic Kingdom" some denser, more humanly compelling content, a great deal of polemical energy has been expended in the attempt to sort out the Jewish provenance in his thinking from the Marxist. His early writings strongly suggest, however, that these may be idle battles. No doubt, Scholem's tutelage helped to lend Benjamin's apocalyptic images a Jewish tinge, just as his Bolshevik lover, the Latvian theater and film figure Asja Lacis, initiated him into the fantasies of an emancipatory Marxism. But it is clear that the category of a messianic redemption of history was central to Benjamin long before Scholem, Lacis, or Brecht crossed his path. It was from the problematic legacy of Germanic-Christian mysticism, especially as it was sublimated in the work of the Jena Romantics, that Benjamin first drew his image of messianic redemption, and that heritage remains clearly audible across all of his subsequent intellectual transformations.

The continuity in Benjamin's thinking is remarkable, and it is nowhere more evident than in the contempt with which all of his writings treat not merely the possibility, but even the value, of a gradual improvement in social conditions. From the opening sentence of "The Life of Students," to his last text, the celebrated "Theses on the Philosophy of History," which he completed in the spring of 1940, it is impossible for Benjamin to mention the word "progress" without derision. To him, the notion of "progress" is simply the last refuge of the intellectually philistine and the politically corrupt. Indeed, of all the policies that the German Communist Party adopted at Stalin's command, the only one that won Benjamin's unwavering allegiance was the definition of the Social Democrats, not the fascist parties, as the real enemy.

And Benjamin actually went much further. In an amalgam that clearly owed more to his lifelong personal preoccupations than to Marxist doctrine, he linked Social Democratic policies, old-fashioned narrative historiography, and

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a belief in the attainability of social progress as three manifestations of a single evil. In his view, it was precisely these ideas that prepared the philosophical path for fascism's success. It is difficult to imagine a more disastrous and self-defeating position in the embattled circumstances of the 1930s; but Benjamin clung to it with increasing stubbornness, even as its untenability became more evident with every Nazi victory. In fact, despite his frequent references to contemporary events, politics as part of daily, collective life was largely irrelevant to Benjamin's theorizing. This is usually the case with messianic absolutism, but rarely has the abyss between historical events as they are actually unfolding and the framework of ideas used to explain them seemed deeper or more unbridgeable than in Benjamin's speculations.

Written as the Nazi armies were already overrunning France, Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" sought to safeguard the promise that a messianic redemption is equally possible at any moment in history. Considering that when he wrote these sentences it was the permanent enslavement of Europe and the extermination of its Jews that looked far more likely, there is a certain heroic obduracy to Benjamin's ending his text with the affirmation that at least for the Jews, "every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter." Throughout these "Theses," Benjamin attempts an uneasy conflation of Marxist and Jewish terminologies, just as he had previously sought to integrate *The Communist* and *The Surrealist Manifestos*. But whether the language of redemption is couched in theological, materialist, or strictly poetic-psychological tropes is clearly of secondary importance: all that truly matters is to remain vigilant for the manifestation of the messianic in all its guises.

Benjamin was mesmerized by historical ruptures, malignant or beneficent, literary or political, because he was convinced of the revelatory authority of the unique and the excessive over the typical and the quotidian. He was deeply attracted to a cluster of powerful image-ideas in Judaism, but for him these were completely detached from their original context in Jewish collective experience and religious thought. Similarly, his Marxism was a strategic appropriation of a cluster of phrases and concepts, rather than the embracing of an entire system. In any case, what real political affinities Benjamin had were actually with Marx's great antagonists Blanqui and Bakunin. The Blanquist dream of a surprise insurrection, a sudden, all-transforming seizure of power, fascinated Benjamin in a way that no conception of history as an unfolding process ever could.

What is striking in all this is how little Benjamin writes about the actual nature of the messianic kingdom whose possible nearness he never ceases to stress. Few men have written so much about the need for a messiah and so little about what his reign will be like or how humanity will be better off under it. This asymmetry between Benjamin's detailed evocation of a degraded present and his blankness about the redeemed future has, I think, two crucial causes. The first is his tacit recognition that his messianic dream is essentially indifferent to such banal concerns as the material conditions of daily existence. In his "Theologico-Political Fragment" he even admitted that "the quest of free humanity for happiness runs counter to the direction of Messianic intensity," and no amount of dialectical maneuvering would ever resolve this fundamental antinomy. What is more decisive, though, and in many ways the most original and the most fantastical of all Benjamin's passions, is that the redemption for which he longs is not fundamentally oriented toward the future at all.

It is the past, not the future, that Ben-

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jamin's messiah has come to make whole. The face of his angel of history "is turned toward the past" because *there* is where his real desires and his real tasks are rooted. If the redemptive angel has a historical mission it is much closer to Proust's quest to recapture the plenitude of lost time than to Marx's dream of a communist paradise or the apocalyptic prophecies of Jewish messianism. Repeatedly, the retroactive risks to the past from the barbarism of the present are what Benjamin's writings emphasize. He insists that "even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins." Benjamin's messianic revolutionary seeks to "fan the spark of hope in the past" not so much in order to light a fire in the present, but because the past is where paradise can be found and where the truly crucial battles are still to be fought.

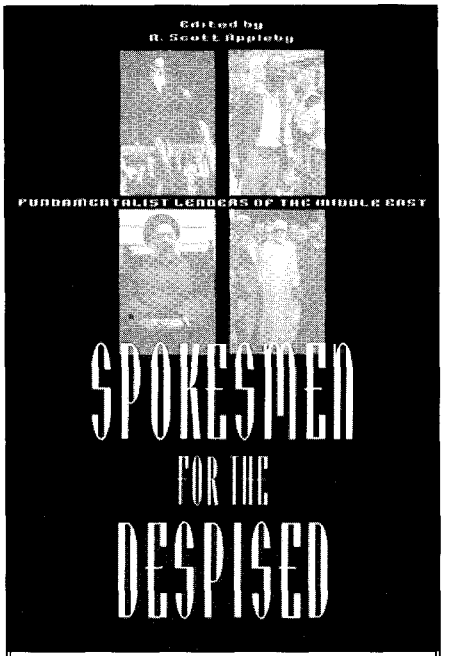
Little wonder that Asja Lacis quickly despaired of converting Benjamin into a plausible Marxist. More seriously troubling, though, is Benjamin's fantasy that a redemptive transformation in the present will make good everything that was left incomplete and injured in the past. As a theological hope grounded in the promise of a beneficent, all-restoring Last Judgment, there is nothing unusual or incoherent about Benjamin's version; but if it is not to seem ethically facile, it requires more moral pressure than Benjamin exerts on it. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, Ivan asks how anyone can rejoice in humanity's redemption without that joy being undermined by the knowledge of a single tortured child for whom the messiah came too late. If one traffics in the rhetoric of redemption as much as Benjamin, then at some point it becomes necessary to confront Ivan's question. But Benjamin never quite does so, and that avoidance undermines the seriousness of his theological stance.

It is not so much that, in Benjamin's phrasing, each age is "endowed with a weak messianic power," but rather that his own messianism is endowed with too weak a religious foundation to function as more than a private language, a shorthand for one man's private yearnings projected upon history. To invoke the category of the theological after it has been emptied of any specific creed or doctrine is little more than a verbal gesture at profundity, and there are times when Benjamin's attempt to give his "philosophy of history" a theological dimension comes perilously close to sonorous vacuity. Even at the purely secular level, Benjamin's vocabulary of retrospective redemption is unsatisfying. Horkheimer's sensible objection to the whole idea was simply to remind Benjamin that historical devastation is "irreparable," and that death ends any chance at restitution.

There was no contradiction between Benjamin's messianism and his materialism, because he was searching for the same thing in each: a way to bring about a collective, historical turning point comparable to Proust's *madeleine*. As with Proust, whom he translated brilliantly into German, it is Benjamin's fidelity to all that has been passed over and discarded that triggers his most moving realizations. Few writers have been more sensitive than Benjamin to how quickly modernity transforms the most up-to-date objects of desire into ridiculous castoffs, and perhaps no one since Baudelaire has written so persuasively about the need for a historian of modernity to become a kind of inspired cultural *chiffonnier* or ragpicker, combing through the detritus of abandoned fashions.

Even in "The Life of Students," Benjamin's youthful, self-regarding preciosity gives way to a simpler, more haunting tone when he begins to speak about finding fragments of utopian possibility "deeply embedded in ... the most endangered, most disparaged and derided" moments. Benjamin was to retain this conviction all his life. His attentiveness to the hopelessly outmoded and obsolete, his resistance to mere "presentism" with its automatic, reflex veneration of whatever has won out in the struggle for success, outshines the often shaky theoretical structures within which he tried to justify his instinctive solicitude. The notorious "garbage heap of history" to which Marxism hoped to consign its vanquished opponents is exactly where Benjamin felt most compelled to linger, and his longing for messianic redemption rings truest when it is spoken on behalf of history's losers without regard to their class allegiances or political views.

There is no sentence in Benjamin, not even the famous description of the storm-hurled "angel of history," that seems to me more ethically and speculatively rich than his claim in "The Task of the Translator" that "one might ... speak of an unforgettable life or moment even if all men had forgotten it. If the nature of such a life or moment required that it be unforgotten, that predicate would not imply a falsehood but merely a claim not fulfilled by men, and probably also a reference to a realm in which it is fulfilled: God's remembrance." To realize the potency of Benjamin's formulation, one need think only of the legacy of Eastern European



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Rilke's Fear of Dogs

had less to do
with any harm
they might inflict
than with the sad
look in their eyes
expressing a need
for love he felt
he couldn't meet.
And so he looked
away from them.

He was too busy
for such obligations,
waiting instead
for angels to speak,
looking up at heaven
with an expression
they couldn't help
responding to,
try as they might
to avoid his gaze.

JEFFREY HARRISON

Jewry, or of any other community whose culture has been brutally obliterated. To respond to that heritage without guilt or sentimentalizing nostalgia is extraordinarily difficult, but Benjamin is right to insist that there are ways of living in the world whose potential has not been exhausted simply because they were extirpated, and whose value should not be judged solely in terms of their longevity and worldly success.

He reminds us that there is a moral dimension to remembering even "the most everyday hour" of a vanished existence, and he shows how much painstaking concentration is required to let what was cast aside be freshly seen in all its singularity. The effort to remain responsive to the unfulfilled possibilities of the past is our only way of disrupting the brutal triumphalism that condemns whatever has perished as deserving its fate because the irresistible logic of history has found it unworthy of continued existence. (Paradoxically, it was Benjamin's *haute bourgeois* predilection for connoisseurship—his father had been a partner in one of Berlin's best-known auction houses—that helped to foster his most subversive and original theories.)

His nostalgic affection for the unglamorous objects and stories left behind by history, his often overpowering collector's instinct, and his inborn melancholy all animate his struggle against what E.P. Thompson has termed "the enormous condescension of posterity," and move him toward a prosaic notion of values. Such a concept—sometimes labeled "prosaics"—rejects any notion of historical inevitability. More importantly, it cherishes the incommensurable value of each human life and the contingent moments of lived experiences not for their place in an already determined larger pattern, but as significant in their own right. For "prosaics," it is not the moment of crisis that brings out the real value of an individual or of an ethics; ideas, values, and people, so "prosaics" insists, are tested best in the daily, routine actions and habits of ordinary life, not in situations of extraordinary peril.

Benjamin's epochal essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, a novel that systematically probes the strength of undramatic domestic values, even against the challenge of overpowering sexual passion, makes clear his sympathetic understanding of "prosaics." And only the most acute awareness of the link between the ethical and the narrative dimensions of "prosaics" could suggest luminous perceptions such as Benjamin's praise of the "chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones [and therefore] acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history."

Disturbingly, though, there is scant indication that Benjamin himself was troubled by the contradictions between his anti-apocalyptic respect for the abiding value of "everything about history that ... has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful" and his violence-infatuated political rhetoric. But perhaps it isn't really a question of "contradictions" at all, at least not in the restricted sense of Benjamin's holding incompatible theories and trying to follow divergent intellectual paths. Both of these descriptions certainly apply to Benjamin, and friends such as Scholem and Adorno pressed him repeatedly—and usually in vain—to help them make sense of the palpable contradictions in his theoretical stances.

Beyond this, though, there is the abiding quandary of how Benjamin could intersperse passages of unalloyed ethical and imaginative crassness into the mandarin refinement that usually characterizes his writing. It is hard to fathom what frustrated urges prompted a brutish vignette such as his praise of revolutionary virility in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called 'once upon a time' in historicism's bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history." Benjamin regularly allegorizes sexuality, especially female sexuality, in grating pseudo-aphorisms: "The prostitute represents the consummated will to culture ... she drives nature from its last sanctuary, sexuality." But it is even more dismaying to hear Benjamin, whose writings on Kafka form one of the few indispensable commentaries on that writer, passively accede to the vileness of Brecht's language about Kafka. On August 5, 1934, one and a half years after Hitler became Germany's chancellor, Benjamin listened to Brecht describe Kafka as "a Jewboy ... a skinny, unlikable creature, a bubble on the iridescent morass of Prague culture," without registering any disgust; and later that month Benjamin readily agreed to discuss his own Kafka essay with Brecht in terms of whether or not the essay "advanced Jewish fascism."

Benjamin's at least tacit acquiescence to this kind of viciousness had relatively little to do with any doctrinal political loyalties. It was the ferocity itself that seems to have appealed to him. Throughout his life he was able to respond to the pronunciation of anathemas and execrations without sharing their authors' beliefs. In 1924, he astonished Scholem by taking out a subscription to Charles Maurras's royalist and anti-Semitic paper *Action française*, whose "perspective" he praised as "the only one from which it is possible to view German politics without being stupefied." For the most part, Benjamin preferred his rhetorical violence to be mediated through the voice of a powerful and dogmatic personality like Brecht; but long before he had any interest in Marxist polemics, Benjamin had dreamt of producing an "annihilating criticism" that would obliterate inferior writing with the ruthless "terror" of its judgments.

Thus Benjamin boasted to his friends that his essay on *Elective Affinities* would effect "the legally binding condemnation and execution" of Friedrich Gundolf, a critic he despised. In person, he was exceptionally diffident and polite, as well as physically awkward, and the rhetoric of terrorism and violence no doubt served as a kind of imaginary redress for the actual vulnerability of an intellectual often frustrated in both his professional ambitions and his personal affairs. Still, such writing was also the unfortunate literary internalization of a climate of savage public abuse and street brawling that marked politics during the Weimar era and helped to undermine Germany's short-lived democracy.

In the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin insists that "the Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist." The

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allure of messianic warfare was not just at the heart of Benjamin's contemptuous impatience with Social Democrats, it also deprived him of any grounds for rejecting the language of violence and imprecation, whether it came from the left and Brecht or from the right and Maurras. If linking messianic redemption to triumph over the incarnations of pure evil is a potent theological notion, it has often had calamitous consequences in the moral and the intellectual realms. Considering that in this century it has been intellectuals, and especially Jewish intellectuals such as Benjamin, who have been "liquidated" in countless numbers and places to advance the messianic fantasies of others, there is something almost willfully self-deceiving and self-destructive in his call for a theologically buttressed Marxist revolution.

Curiously, Benjamin's compulsion to act against his own interests, and sometimes even against his chances for survival, has only enhanced the glamor of his posthumous canonization. His life and his works have acquired the aura of a legend, and the decisive turning-points in his career, from his semi-deliberate failure to secure the *Habilitation* certification required for teaching at a German university, to his suicide after crossing the Pyrenees and reaching Port Bou in Spain in September 1940, have been described so often and with such reverence that they begin to seem like set-pieces from an orthodox hagiography. One of the chief merits of Momme Brodersen's scrupulously researched biography is that it sets out to correct such facile mythologizing and to replace it with a factually reliable account of Benjamin's life, social milieu, and literary-philosophical background.

Brodersen, who has also produced the most authoritative Benjamin bibliography, draws fruitfully upon decades of specialized research and exhibits a real flair for telling details and images. Along with extensive quotations from Benjamin's own writing, including the private journals, letters, and fragmentary working notes, this biography includes a wealth of fascinating photographs and documents. And yet the field of Benjamin studies has become so contentious and personalized that, as Brodersen notes in his introduction, he was refused all help from the trustees of the Benjamin estate in Frankfurt and denied access to the Adorno archives. Fortunately, he seems not to have let these rebuffs affect his judgments, and his book avoids the cloying pieties of Benjamin's idolaters without succumbing to the churlish temptation to denigrate Benjamin's own achievements.

The issue of perspective and context is particularly important, because the basic facts of Benjamin's life are already securely established, and with the exception of a few crucial issues, especially the precise sequence of events in the hours before Benjamin's death from an overdose of morphine, even the most diligent research is unlikely to discover much significant new information. Moreover, although Benjamin's lifelong restlessness, and his need to maintain an intricate web of rivalrous erotic and intellectual relationships, provide ample material for an engrossing story, it is "on the page" and in the shifting, often incompatible loyalties of his theoretical allegiances that his most intense experiences took place.

From his cosseted childhood on, Benjamin was extraordinarily ambitious, and yet the choices he made—in his love life, in his writing, and even in his lethally tardy response to the Nazi conquest of France—show him courting disaster with the sure-footed instinct of a somnambulist. Perhaps he intuited that posterity would be more fascinated by a writer whose life was marked by exemplary failures than by the conventional academic

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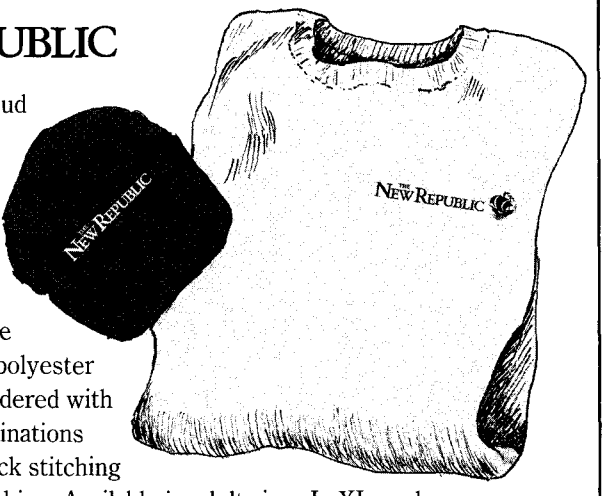

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successes of his friends and collaborators such as Scholem, Adorno, or Horkheimer. Most of Benjamin's important projects remained unfinished and unpublished, and yet no one better understood the hold that the fragmentary can have on our imagination. His subject matter and the conduct of his own life were deeply consonant, and the vulnerability that he valued in his favorite writers extended to his own self-representation. So, for example, when Benjamin opens his diary entry for August 17, 1931 with the melancholy thought that his situation possesses "all the relevance that only hopelessness can give it," it is hard to imagine that he didn't hear, and perhaps find consolation in, the echo of his own closing lines from the *Elective Affinities* essay: "only for the sake of the hopeless have we been given hope."

But he cared tremendously about his position in the literary world. He was not merely indulging in wish-fulfillment when he wrote to Scholem in 1930 that "the goal I had set for myself has not yet been totally realized, but I am finally getting close. The goal is that I be considered the foremost critic of German literature." Legend, some of it initiated by Benjamin himself, has made much of the University of Frankfurt's rejection in 1925 of his thesis on *The Origin of German Tragic Drama.* But Brodersen charts how carefully Benjamin orchestrated an event whose positive outcome he "dreaded" far more than any failure. The prospect of teaching appalled Benjamin, and years of being supported largely by others—first by his parents and then, until their separation and divorce, by his wife Dora—made the prospect of a regular job simultaneously intimidating and a matter of no great importance to him.

In the event, though, until the Nazi accession to power, Benjamin's career as a writer and critic flourished as never before after his decisive break with academia. Far from being neglected, he occupied a prominent place in the serious literary journalism of the era. Much of the valuable literary and cultural criticism in Weimar Germany was conducted in the numerous successful journals that sprang up throughout the 1920s, often sponsored by the country's major publishing houses. Brodersen reminds us that throughout these decades Berlin was "the world's greatest newspaper city," with well over 2,000 different periodicals. To one of the most prestigious of these, the *Literarische Welt*, Benjamin contributed over one hundred separate articles between October 1925 and February 1933, and the still better established *Frankfurter Zeitung* was nearly as hospitable to his writing. The 1920s also marked the beginning of nationwide radio broadcasts, and Benjamin quickly realized the possibilities of the new medium as an important outlet for his work. Between 1929 and 1932, he made more than eighty separate broadcasts. Radio and highbrow journals were equally eager for cultural commentary, and Benjamin was often able to sell the same text with only minor modifications to both. Moreover, his extensive work with this new medium led Benjamin to some of his most probing theoretical inquiries into the influence of the modern technological apparatus on the production, the dissemination, and the consumption of art.

Like any author, Benjamin confronted rejection and indifference; but compared, say, to Adorno's early work, Benjamin's commanded considerably more attention and respect. Even his immensely difficult book on German tragic drama was favorably reviewed in many of his country's relevant periodicals, as well as in important journals in Hungary, France, Austria, and England. And yet it is the image of Benjamin as a marginal, disregarded genius whose radical insights only posterity has been able to appreciate that has become part of our own repertoire of received ideas, fixed so securely that, perhaps, no factual counter-evidence will ever quite dislodge it.

Since we are that posterity, there is something distastefully self-flattering in the zeal with which Benjamin's legend has been embraced and amplified by his more clamorous admirers. It is *our* "enormous condescension" to the intellectual world that Benjamin inhabited that lets us recycle such thin narratives as the myth that he uniquely embodied European culture's "redemptive" hopes, and it is the scarcely disguised wish to be acclaimed as his successor that prompts literary critics whose circumstances are so utterly different from his to announce their identification with Benjamin's struggles.

Unsurprisingly, the romanticization of Benjamin's life passes over most of the positive details that Brodersen brings out, preferring instead to focus entirely on the story of Benjamin's final years as an exile in Paris, and on his futile, too-long-delayed decision to make use of the American visa that Horkheimer had secured for him. Consider, for example, the following, well-known description: "Walter Benjamin's life was rich in displacements." Thus one prominent critic glossed Benjamin's nervous packings and unpackings, optimistically eliding the lethal cost of those displacements to the man himself as well as their crippling effects on his writing. Or, more accurately, the phrase interprets the exile Benjamin endured as triggering a kind of compensatory clarity and insight denied to those who never had to undergo similar upheavals. And in doing so it draws on what has long been a cultural commonplace, according to which it is from the distance of the exile's perspective that one sees with the clearest gaze, and from the loneliness of an exile's experiences that one learns to speak the deepest truths.

It is discouraging, though, how even after the unprecedented mass butcheries of recent history, the supposedly revelatory value of exile and oppression continues to be invoked as though it were self-evident. Such a facile economics of physical and emotional hardship recompensed by an accumulation of inner treasures is akin, in its tawdriness, to the complaint that though despotic regimes, unlike democracies, may imprison writers for their opinions, by doing so these tyrannies make clear how much more seriously they regard the authority of the word than does our own "bourgeois" culture.

Benjamin himself resisted such prattle. He was usually remarkably lucid about his own collaboration in the catastrophes that befell him. Already in 1932, he admitted to Scholem that "though many—or a sizeable number—of my works have been small-scale victories, they are offset by large-scale defeats." Benjamin was repeatedly drawn to the idea of suicide long before his physical debility and the fear of being turned over to the Nazis caused him to take his own life. In 1941, eleven years after her

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divorce from Benjamin, Dora speculated that he had married her primarily to have someone nearby to check his self-destructive impulses.

Benjamin characterized himself as a melancholic born "under the sign of Saturn," and found spiritual kinship with writers like Baudelaire, Proust, and Kafka, who understood the seductiveness of despondency. He wrote brilliantly about all three writers, and his descriptions make clear not only the extent of his identification, but also his hope that he, too, might make out of his weaknesses and his derelictions the foundation of a great work. He hoped that his loneliness, like Proust's, might be powerful enough "to pull the world down into its vortex with the force of a maelstrom."

Nothing in Benjamin's writings seems to me sadder than those moments when he acknowledges the failure of that hope. Referring to his intense labor of translating Proust into German, Benjamin wrote: "Unproductive involvement with a writer who so splendidly pursues goals that are similar to my own, at least former, goals occasionally induces something like symptoms of internal poisoning in me." For all his cosmopolitan erudition, there are times when what Benjamin most closely resembles is not one of his literary heroes, but rather the Russian Jew described by Isaac Babel as going through life "with spectacles on his nose and autumn in his heart."

Nowhere are Benjamin's helplessness and bad luck more apparent than in the unhappy saga of his last-minute flight from Paris in May 1940, first to Lourdes, then to Marseilles, and finally, on September 26, from Banyuls-sur-Mer into Spain. The story has been told many times, in biographies, in virtually every introduction to Benjamin's writings, in many of the critical studies devoted to him, and in first-hand accounts by several of the crucial figures involved, notably in *Escape through the Pyrenees*, the gripping memoir by Lisa Fitko, who led the small group that included Benjamin on their illegal trek. The opening of the Spanish archives after Franco's death has also enabled scholars to examine the police and medical files on Benjamin, and Brodersen helpfully summarizes and evaluates their findings.

With so many factual accounts readily available, it is hard to understand the appeal of a fictionalized treatment of this grim conclusion, unless that retelling were to illuminate the episode in new ways. This is just what *Benjamin's Crossing*, Jay Parini's tone-deaf and idea-deaf novel, fails to do. The novel is narrated by several different figures, and the sections written in Scholem's voice are astonishingly off-key to anyone familiar with his writings. The portrait of Benjamin's inner consciousness is scarcely more convincing, composed for the most part of potted summaries of his best-known texts, amplified by implausible reflections invented for the occasion.

Here are three characteristic passages from the novel. The first is supposedly from a letter by Scholem to Dora Benjamin, the second is an account of Benjamin reading his description of the Angel of History to Julie Farendot, and the third is a description of Benjamin at work at his desk in the library:

> The Nazis are winning the war. They may well consume Europe and destroy whatever we thought we meant by the term *civilization*. I swear, if they damage one hair on Walter's head, I will curse them forever.

> "History has failed us," Benjamin said. "But I was unrealistic, I suppose. I thought everything would happen differently." Julie watched him intently. She could only just comprehend that such a creature lived and breathed, so eccentric and lovable.

> Benjamin felt as if bright lights burned outside of his ken; he could feel the heat but not see the light.... But it was hard. At times the ontological status of language seemed itself the problem; it was not reality. Words and things embraced on rare occasions, but often without comfort. And what was history but words, an imperfect string of vocables designed to stand in for something supposedly more real? As often happened these days, Benjamin found himself weeping as he wrote, struggling with his own limitations as a thinker, as a human being.

It is not Benjamin's mind but his damaged body that Parini is successful in representing. Benjamin's physical clumsiness, his bad heart, his chronic shortness of breath, and his tentative, arrhythmic gait come across powerfully; and in his rendering of the contrast between Benjamin's crushing exhaustion and the gorgeous sun-drenched landscape through which he and his fellow refugees were fleeing, Parini shows a degree of authority that his novel otherwise lacks. But these descriptions are not what have secured the novel so much favorable attention. Instead, a book that has Scholem pronounce appalling phrases like "the European mind has lost its champion, its dauphin, its sweetest prince, though nobody really knows it" plays so shrewdly upon the accumulation of clichés surrounding Benjamin, and so thoroughly satisfies the laziest expecta-

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tions of its audience, that its success is entirely predictable. Parini provides exactly what his American readers want: a hero who (in the words of the dustjacket) is "an archetypal Old World intellectual ... an outsider for all times—including our own."

Parini's simplification unwittingly raises the question of why Benjamin himself never wrote any significant fiction. His contemporaries wondered about this as well, and in 1935 Gunther Anders composed a short dialogue called "The Defect," in which Benjamin is described as "lacking something required to write novels ... that small drop of stupidity and illogicality that a novelist must already have if he is to put it into the mouths of his characters and let them talk realistically." Perhaps. But the explanation seems to me much less interesting than the fact that there was a felt need to provide one in the first place. As so often, Benjamin's own self-description is both harsher and more probing: "I am not interested in people; I am interested only in things." Benjamin sensed that with a temperament such as his, one can write criticism of lasting importance, but not great fiction. No doubt what makes both his messianic longings and his politics so abstract is exactly what makes him so appealing to academic theoreticians today.

Benjamin has often been accused of being unable to commit himself to any one theoretical perspective, emotional attachment, or course of action. But this misunderstands, I think, the nature of Benjamin's dilemma. Intense commitment posed no threat; it was loss that Benjamin could not accept. Leaving behind anything he loved was a source of lasting pain, and since his deepest love was for texts, for ideas, and for objects, he kept adding to his storehouse of them, like an ardent collector for whom a new acquisition is never meant to supplant any of the earlier ones. The logic of a collection need not be an inner consonance among its components, nor need it be organized according to fixed hierarchic principles; it is sufficient that at one time or another each element has pleased the collector himself. So it is with Benjamin's idiosyncratic appropriations of concepts and tropes from mutually antagonistic theoretical positions. As a collector, Benjamin resisted making hierarchies or weeding out, and I doubt that he ever willingly abandoned an important item from his storehouse of cherished objects and ideas. ("When you're in love, you don't explain, you itemize," as Frank O'Hara put it.)

Benjamin has frequently been claimed as the inspired predecessor of today's leveling eclecticism, but the impassioned heterogeneity of his approach is very far from the casual, unproblematic movement among different eras and models that we think of as "postmodernist." The postmodernist catalog is temporary and easily abandoned. Benjamin's, by contrast, is fiercely cumulative and impossible to discard. And this loyalty to all that has been abandoned as worthless, to everything whose loss has not been acknowledged or registered, is Benjamin's abiding legacy.

It is what made it increasingly difficult for him to complete any of his projects, or to save himself when that meant leaving behind the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, where he was free to spend his days seeking out long-forgotten treasures. Of all the critical comments on Proust made by other writers, Benjamin most admired Jacques Rivière's remark that "Marcel Proust died of the same inexperience of the world which permitted him to write his works." Benjamin's identification with such a description is obvious, but his own case is still more paradoxical. It is true that the unworldliness and the loyalty to his obsessions that undermined his chances after the fall of France simultaneously enabled his best writing; but these same traits also guaranteed that much of that writing would never be developed beyond disparate notations of luminous details.

In 1938, he closed a lengthy letter to Scholem about Kafka with a summary that reads uncannily—and in all likelihood, intentionally—like his own epitaph:

> To do justice to the figure of Kafka ... one must never lose sight of one thing: it is the figure of a failure. The circumstances of this failure are manifold. One is tempted to say: once he was certain of eventual failure, everything worked out for him *en route* as in a dream. There is nothing more memorable than the fervor with which Kafka emphasized his failure.

Benjamin's words are painfully precise about himself, if not about Kafka. The longing for redemption and the criticism of culture were never integrated into the great work about which he dreamed for more than a decade. Yet his failure continues to fascinate more than many of the "successes" of his contemporaries; and Benjamin, the great connoisseur of defeats and lost causes, would have understood that fascination better than anyone. •

Scot Free

BY KARL MILLER

Busted Scotch: Selected Stories by James Kelman

(W.W. Norton, 262 pp., $23)

The Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Fiction edited by Peter Kravitz

(Picador UK, 560 pp., £16.99)

Earlier in the century, in the days of the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, there was talk of a Scottish literary renaissance, and there is talk of one now, in the days of the novelists James Kelman and Irvine Welsh. Both renaissances have been seen as in part political. The new one is displayed in an anthology by Peter Kravitz, who seems to want a Scotland that is separate from England, and who explains that there is a new self-confidence abroad in the north of the island for which the writers of fiction deserve credit. And more than one of the pieces in the book suggest that this free country could turn out to be a pharmatopia—that its inhabitants would be entering, to the skirl of the bagpipes, a millennium of the needle.

Britain's recent months have been eventful, quite apart from the mass mourning for Diana. Half of those under thirty are reported to be taking or to have taken illegal drugs, and a commission of inquiry has been set up in London to look at the problem this represents and at the possibility, among others, of freeing the softer drugs from legal sanctions. Scottish politicians have shown little interest in this problem. What they have been interested in lately is devolution, involving some degree of withdrawal from England. A referen-

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dum has been held in which Scottish residents have voted for an Assembly of their own, to be housed, perhaps, in my old Edinburgh school, and to grant it the power to adjust the level of taxation.

One-sixth of the Scots population of the island was stated in the census of 1991 to be living in England and Wales. I am one of them. I didn't have a referendum vote, and there are Scots people who would say that I ought not to be heard on the subject, though I may feel myself Scots; but it's all right, apparently, for Sean Connery, in sunny Marbella, to hold forth nobly in my old school about the beauties of Scottish sovereignty. There are Scots people, too, including the leadership of the Scottish National Party, Labour's partner in devolution, who regard it as a step in the direction of full independence.

The Labour government in London is back in power after a long spell in the wilderness, and it is largely led by Scotsmen, which has not prevented the London *Observer* from declaring that "decision-making needs to be brought closer to the Scottish people." The government intends that there will be fewer Scots MPs in the Westminster Parliament; these MPs will have a voice on English matters, while English MPs will be denied one on Scottish matters. There are other such snags, and they make it difficult to understand why Labour should claim, as the National Party does not, that devolution will strengthen the Union. Imagine what will happen when a Conservative British government has to treat with the inevitability of a Labour-dominated Scottish Assembly. The political gap between North and South, which was evident in the 1980s, and which had closed dramatically by the time of Labour's triumph at the last election, makes a stronger case for the change than the economic arguments do. But I don't see it as decisive.

What is needed is a more restricted measure of devolution, shared with other regions of the United Kingdom. A regional uniformity may be attempted in due course, but it will be hard to secure, and in the meantime Britain is at risk of being cut in half. Despite all ideological claims to the contrary, the United Kingdom has always been a melting-pot—an *e pluribus unum*, like the United States—and has become even more so with the end of empire and the arrival of the new immigrant communities. A principal aim of government should now be to ensure that Britain's various communities live together in peace, and Scottish devolution is unlikely to help with that.

Scotland, too, has the complexity of its various communities, not all of them present in *The Picador Book of Contemporary Scottish Fiction.* These pieces of fiction describe a small country in which the same situations recur: captive wives, captive husbands, drunken drives of escape. Two stories are about mid-life crises and refer to Dante's dark wood and the middle of the human journey. Two others have a competition between the genders which involves the skimming of stones across water. Others again are about eerie, injured, backpacking loners. None of the writers proselytizes on behalf of an independent Scotland, and one of the best-known, Allan Massie, is content to be British. In the fiction and in the public pronouncements of some of these writers, London is a place to which snobs and achievers and addicts and winos run away. It has occasionally been made to seem like a place where English writers award prizes to Scottish writers whose laces they are unfit to tie. English reviewers have found a fashion, and an exciting scorn, in the new Scots writing, just as the English at large, those who have been attending, have so far been polite and appreciative about the news from the North that the Scots have been as unrepresented politically as pre-Revolutionary Boston.

It is the scenes from working-class life, and from addicts' and alcoholics' life, which stand out in Kravitz's anthology. James Kelman and Irvine Welsh are famous for such scenes, and Thomas Healy joins them here with a genre piece, a brilliant "jolly beggars." Someone called Rab appears in this piece and elsewhere in the collection; in real life, there is a dynamic, charismatic television anti-hero of the same name, and the national poet is a Rab ("Rabbie Burns"). "Rab" is a Northern tendency, incarnate. He lives in Glasgow, rather than Edinburgh, and he is a ranter and a drinker. There may now be substance abuse, though it isn't easy to think of him on Ecstasy. The chances are that he didn't bother much about the referendum, in which only half of Glasgow chose to vote.

This Northern tendency is also visible in James Kelman's stories. The success of his stories varies, I think, in proportion to their nearness, their belongingness, to Glasgow. There are those in which the speaker or character has no name or address or job, and in which K for Kelman is K for Kafka or B for Beckett—those, in other words, where an emulation occurs. But he is at his best when he does for his city, in his own way, something not entirely different from what

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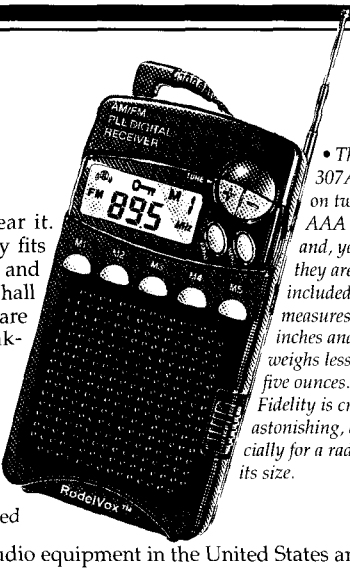

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Damon Runyon did for New York. The James of the stories is, like the characters who resemble him, a fairly benevolent misanthrope, hostile, sarcastic (but not always), a drinker, not a drugger, a nervous, perhaps disturbed man, a detector of alien threats and ain-folk threats, an ironist of the grizzling, drizzling soliloquy. He is very funny, and very funny about his own grudges and troubles. There's a riff in one of the stories about how he can't be doing with killjoys. Out they come from their holes to blight the pubs, he moans. "He just couldn't be bothered with it. They were misanthropes. The very last thing he ever wanted to be." The joke is on them, and on him.

Kelman is an urban writer whose characters are seldom in the open air. And his few landscapes are apt to remain in the mind, as a match for the bleakness of his domestic interiors—a bleakness in which much of his comedy originates. One such interior is a senior citizen's flat, "so heavy an atmosphere—that dull yellow everywhere and it all so damn unhealthy and just damn bloody ungood." The last of these adjectives seems, for some unspecifiable reason, just right, bloody good. Elsewhere, in "by the burn," one of the least promising of the country's unemployed drags himself through an outdoors of marsh and undergrowth:

> By the time he arrived in the office he wouldnt be in a fit state for the interview. They probably wouldnt even let him in the fucking door man they would send for the fucking polis, the way he was looking, the suit all fucking mud and the boots turned white because of the fucking dampness man it was just bloody out of order, you just had no fucking chance. He needed a car. Every cunt needed a car.

The humor then turns into horror, a horror that is perhaps too much for the story to bear.

Like Irvine Welsh, James Kelman is a fine user of the Scots tongue. It is transliterated by both of them to a degree that must stretch the reading skills of their English fans, but with no descent into a pedantry of phonetic spelling. Welsh's "likesay" is a staple usage: it corresponds to "the likes of" and could be called the Edinburgh for "as it were." He may be the first to put it into print.

Welsh, who, with his narcotic deaths and desperations and fecal catastrophes, can read like a latecomer to the punk aesthetic, is funny, too. He is an essentially comic talent. The people in his novel *Trainspotting* are seen by one of them as "warm-hearted rebels" against bourgeois conformity. One or two may seem socialistic, but they are all enthusiasts for a free market in the circulation of drugs—those drugs that harden the heart, as the novel also makes clear. In *Trainspotting*, the Rab-figure is Renton, an Aberdeen University drop-out who lives in Edinburgh or "Embra," who is into and out of heroin, who is as moralistic when he likes as any Covenanting minister, and who exhibits a Leavisian critical intransigence in the matter of rock music. Renton looks like a role-model both for the sympathetic reader and for the writer; he is probably as authorial, in that sense, as the schoolteacher Doyle in Kelman's novel *A Disaffection*.

At one point in *Trainspotting*, a monologue of Renton's runs as follows:

> Ah don't hate the English. They're just wankers. We are colonised by wankers. We can't even pick a decent, vibrant, healthy culture to be colonised by. No. We're ruled by effete arseholes. What does that make us? The lowest of the fuckin low, the scum of the earth. The most wretched, servile, miserable, pathetic trash that was ever shat intae creation. Ah don't hate the English. They just git oan wi the shite thuv goat. Ah hate the Scots.

This powerful bravura passage is enough to make Kelman's people sound like pussycats. Is it a political statement? To refer to people as "scum" in this way is less like politics than like a despair of politics, or a contempt for it; and it is surprising to learn that the passage was used by the Scottish National Party for recruitment purposes in 1996. It is not the sort of thing which the IRA would indulge themselves by publishing in embattled Ulster, where patriots have also found it hard to behave politically. But then Renton can't really be considered a patriot. He feels neither British nor Scottish. "Scotland the brave, ma arse."

Renton's politics, so far as he has them, are at once class-based and tribal: his tribe consists of those in poverty who take drugs and are keen on music and football, and the Scottish middle class is no dearer to him than the English one, though it's true that the Tory governments of the last decade conferred a special horror on the English connection. If any single person is the architect of Scottish devolution, it is Margaret Thatcher.

Renton is wrong to take it for granted that Scotland has been England's colony, though certainly the Scots have been pained and damaged by the connection in a number of respects. In other respects, they have ridden along with it very comfortably, while holding onto their way of life, their ways of life. It isn't entirely spiteful to say that Scotland had a starring role in the British Raj, and began to want out of Britain when the Empire finally came to grief with the failure of the Anglo-French Suez scam of the 1950s.

"Nobody leaves Edinburgh," said an Edinburgh man once, meaning that it's nice there. And so it is. But many do leave in search of work and opportunity. The Scots are used to this, and to their distant cousins; buy they don't always like them. One of Kelman's stories goes after working-class Scots expatriates: they acquire certificates, sell themselves to the highest bidder, and wind up abroad. "Then they spend the rest of their lives keeping other folk down." Colonists, likesay. For such critics, going to London, except for respites or romantic escapes, can seem especially odious. Welsh seems easier than most of them on expatriates. For a time, apparently, he worked in London.

As a London Scot, I am exposed to a suspicion of bias or indifference in the matter of Scottish rights and Scottish writing. I am, in fact, unfriendly to neither of them, and I feel as if the debates about them have been written in my blood, as Scotland is. Not only have episodes of the present crisis been associated with my old school; one of Welsh's black stories, which has recently become a television film, is located in the mining village outside Edinburgh where I was raised. Gilmerton has rarely reached the pages of literature, though Walter Scott did give it a brief whirl. A whirl very different from Welsh's whirl, which is more like a maelstrom out of Poe.

Welsh's is a phantasmagoric Gilmerton, somewhere near the end of the night, full of bad words and bad vibes. All opportunity has deserted a local lad, and he is turned into a fly by God, who resembles a sardonic urban-Scotland pub man, not to say barfly. Meanwhile the lad's mum is artificially sodomizing the lad's dad, while demanding to know who he's been with the night before. "Anna Ford," gasps the dad, implicating a BBC television newscaster of irreproachable English upper-class chic.

Gilmerton has for centuries been quite a hard place, but there were plenty of interesting and well-intentioned people about when I grew up there, including an accomplished actress and an accomplished classical musician, who went off to pursue their callings in London—the kind of thing that happens everywhere in the world. Gilmerton's pit has since closed, and such closures have brought unemployment and anomie to parts of the Lothians: but I don't think the village has phantasmagorically

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changed. Welsh's capers are a rather severe extrapolation from the hard life it has always known.

I might add that I appear in Peter Kravitz's introduction to his anthology as a know-nothing expatriate, who mistook the title of Frank Kuppner's poem-cycle "Albanian Folk Songs": "The Scots-born editor [me] asked why he [Kuppner] was writing about a distant south-eastern European country and he had to point out that Alba was the Gaelic for Scotland." It may be that Frank Kuppner's Gaelic is more fluent than mine, but I have to point out that when I was a Gilmerton lad I wrote a radio feature entitled *Damon in Albany*, which was set in a region of early modern Scotland. So ignorantly unpatriotic are London-based expats deemed to be that this piece of hearsay was thought to be worth a paragraph. Renaissances should be made of sterner stuff.

There are those in the new wave of Scottish writing who give the impression that a macho bitterness and contempt are beautiful, that an oppressive society, "the system," is the root of all evil, that it is better to be dead to the world—or just plain dead—than middle-class, that the swaggering old Scots expression "no bother" may have come to signify wanting out or not doing anything. Both Welsh and Kelman can give that impression, in their different ways and to different degrees. There are times when I am torn between blaming them for meaning it and blaming them for putting it on or playing it up. Still, I admire the stories that are hurled together in *Trainspotting*, and I admire many of Kelman's stories, such as the magnificent "Greyhound for Breakfast." Rab has always had his virtues, and Renton is more sympathetic than some of his rants are.

I admire these two writers for their way of writing in Scots, for refusing to subordinate local speech to the standard English of a framing narrative, and for showing that there are people in there, in the pubs and in "the schemes"—a local word for the housing projects, as of Eastern Europe, where a tribal self-destruction has been happening. There is war between the system and the schemes, these writers say. And they say that some of their people are trapped between the pit and the pendulum of the system and the schemes. This could well be seen, and resented, as ideological by many readers who, despite that, are in no doubt that both of them have done something.

KARL MILLER is the author most recently of *Rebecca's Vest*, a memoir.

TRB *continued from page 4*

Clinton announced definitive plans for the idea in Detroit during his 1996 reelection campaign. But it was actually the product of a long struggle between pro-expansion and anti-expansion factions of the foreign-policy elite. Once this dispute was settled, the Clinton administration began marshalling ethnic support. The Clinton administration used the ethnics, not the other way around.

Indeed, the NATO decision suggests the continuity between cold war and post-cold war American foreign policy. From the U.S.-Japan defense treaty to NATO, the Clinton administration has adapted cold war institutions to match new realities. The establishment has been well-represented in these deliberations. The architect of East Asia policy was Joseph Nye, Huntington's colleague from Harvard. Foreign policy remains largely an elite concern. The elite may be drawn from a broader demographic pool than it was in Kennan's day—a pool that includes people of Jewish ancestry such as National Security Adviser Samuel R. Berger and Hispanics like U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson. But Huntington and Schlesinger wouldn't suggest these people decide issues based on ethnic self-interest any more than Henry Kissinger did or Ralph Bunche. Why, then, do they level that charge at ethnic Americans who don't happen to be in government?

Despite their protestations of concern about American liberal democracy, Huntington's and Schlesinger's lucubrations about the various ethnic lobbies are actually a complaint about the unruly workings of that democracy, which guarantees all citizens the right to petition their government and is thus inherently subject to the push and pull of competing brands of foreign-policy moralism. Good realists that they are, Huntington and Schlesinger disdain the intrusion of moralism into the supposedly value-neutral business of pursuing America's national interest. Schlesinger calls America an "international nag." Huntington has written that "the belief that non-Western peoples should adopt Western values, institutions, and culture is, if taken seriously, immoral in its implications." But how different is this from the relativism of the multiculturalists?

The ultimate irony of Huntington's and Schlesinger's jeremiads is that these men are themselves the avatars of a particularism. They represent the last gasp of the oldest ethnic lobby in America: the WASP establishment, which is losing its prerogatives and privileges but never really had a monopoly on foreign-policy wisdom in the first place.

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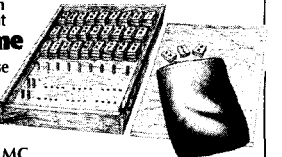
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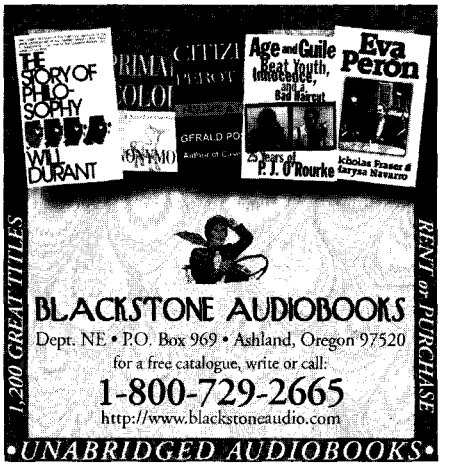
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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Road hogs

WE ARE LIVING IN A JEAN-CLAUDE van Damme movie. This realization struck me on a recent Saturday as I was relaxing at one of the myriad Starbucks near my home in Northwest, D.C. The grande latte skimme was just approaching my lips when I saw a huge sport utility vehicle—a Ford Expedition—slam on its brakes. The driver, positioned high above the other cars, had noticed a traffic jam ahead on Connecticut Avenue. The sporty Miata behind him, lacking such an early warning system, plowed into the Expedition from behind. Impact occurred where the bottom of the Expedition's bumper met the base of the Miata's windshield.

SPORT UTILITY VEHICLES HAVE taken over our streets. Each year these machines get bigger and tougher; some of them look as if they are outfitted with surface-to-surface missiles. Of course, on the pot-holed streets of the District, an off-road, four-wheel drive vehicle is useful. Still, this trend is not only about utility. As Ron Hill, the chairman of the transportation design department at the Art Center College of Design in California, says, "it's all about image." People have realized that they can get the appearance of "off-road country living," with all the adventure that implies, without venturing off the road and, God forbid, into the uncivilized countryside.

I'M NOT OPPOSED TO INTENSELY expressive cars. My first and only car was a 1978 Austin Mini. I was living in England at the time, and I bought the car thinking it would allow me to explore the British countryside. Well, not really. I bought the Mini because it had lots of character. Some of that character was less appealing—like the sunroof that never closed completely. Nor was it exactly the safest car: one day averting a small animal—a rabbit, I think—I nearly totalled the front end. But at 23, I was prepared to live dangerously. I even relished it. When I sold the Mini to a student at the Oxford Polytech for 300 quid before moving back to the United States, I shuddered to think he was buying it for the parts. Practicality meant more to him than personality.

NOW I THINK THAT HE MAY HAVE had a point. The largest sport utility vehicles—the Ford Expeditions, the Chevrolet Suburbans—are widely considered the safest cars on the road. This is safety subjectively considered. The driver of the sport utility vehicle is safe, and all the other cars on the road live in Darwinian peril. Partly because these truck-like cars are more prevalent on the road (in the past six years, sales have quadrupled), and partly because there are simply more cars on the road (the number of vehicles has grown in the past 25 years six times faster than the human population), accidents involving sport utility vehicles are becoming more common; more deaths result from accidents involving sport utility vehicles than from accidents involving normal-size cars. And while federal money is being used to conduct air-bag safety studies, most highway patrol officers say that, in a collision with a sport utility vehicle, an air-bag is not going to save you. The result may only be a rise in the sales of ever-larger sport utility vehicles, leading to a kind of auto arms race. Kim Hazelbaker of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety says that drivers these days are worried that "the other guy is going to do something stupid," and they want as much protection as possible. It's not just defensive driving; owning a sport utility vehicle has become offensive driving.

A FEW DAYS AFTER THE ACCIDENT at Starbucks, I took the Metro to a car dealership in Bethesda, just outside the District. The place was filled with young couples and families clambering around in various show models. When I told the sales consultant that I was interested in a sport utility vehicle, he kindly ushered me over to the Oldsmobile Bravado with its SmartTrak system that "moves into action the instant you need additional traction." Curious about the issue of safety, I asked the sales consultant if he was concerned about reckless drivers using four-wheel drive vehicles. He politely told me that he takes new drivers for a test drive and points out concerns about a driver's style or habits. He encourages owners to read the safety guidelines in the car manual, but admitted sheepishly, "as to whether they read it, I don't know."

SITTING BEHIND THE STEERING wheel of the Bravado, I felt as if I had entered a cavern. Excited, I asked the salesman if he had anything bigger. He led me to the Chevy Tahoe—"incredibly rugged . . . incredibly refined"—and then into the driver's seat of what Chevy describes as "the largest sport utility vehicle on the planet," the Suburban. Behind the wheel of this 5,000-pound machine, with room enough for a family of nine—a family of nine?—I was mesmerized by the automatic door locks, the "theatre" seating, the child safety latches, the dual air-bags, the trailering capabilities, the custom leather seats, and the tinted windows (standard feature). It gave me a feeling of unapproachability. There was only one problem: I wasn't sure who was really in control.

WALKING BACK TO THE METRO, I felt oddly vulnerable. Why had I so blithely surrendered my armor? I hailed a taxi and asked the driver to take me to Capitol Cadillac, the only dealer in the area that specializes in the High-Mobility, Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle, otherwise known as the Humvee, or the Hummer to civilians such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, who owns five. Weighing in at 6,400 pounds, the Hummer sells to (surprise!) a mostly male population between the ages of 35 and 54. And, although this mammoth was originally designed for the off-road activities of the U.S. Army, only a small fraction of Hummer owners use theirs for off-road adventures. But the Hummer is no longer just the play-thing of urban viriles. It is also becoming popular with soccer moms who have $80,000 to invest. I can see why. The Hummer is everything you could ask for in a husband: silent (when the engine isn't running), big, and protective.

THE SALESMAN WOULDN'T LET ME take the Hummer for a test drive. "The product manager is off today," he told me, but he encouraged me to sit in the parked vehicle. Behind the wheel of the Hummer, I felt small but lean, and very hostile. I imagined myself "plowing through three-foot snowdrifts, gliding over mountainous dunes, fording deep mud bogs and previously impassable streams." I could see myself pulling up to my apartment in Adams Morgan and triumphantly making a new parking space. Yet there was something wrong. Somewhat agitated, I fiddled with the door handle. It wouldn't open. I had accidentally locked it. Finally, I pushed the door open and climbed out, breaking a nail, running my stockings, and ripping the seam of my skirt. The salesman looked at me puzzled. "Next time you might want to wear jeans," he said. I rushed outside and into the rain. And as I walked home, watching the cars whiz by, my thoughts turned wistfully to my Mini.

SUSAN ELLINGWOOD

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Why Did You Kill Our Hero?

Petty Officer 3rd Class Harold Mansfield Jr., murdered by a white supremacist.

Petty Officer Harold Mansfield had a special relationship with a 4th grade class in Oklahoma City. When the United States entered the Gulf War, Mansfield was serving on an aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf. The class adopted Mansfield as a pen pal.

The students wrote letters to him, kept his photograph on the bulletin board and drew pictures of his ship. When the war ended, they welcomed Mansfield home with 300 balloons and speeches they had written.

Three weeks later, the students learned that their friend was dead — murdered by a white supremacist in Jacksonville, Florida. (The killer is now serving life in prison.)

Teaching Tolerance magazine told the story of Harold Mansfield and the 4th-graders to illustrate how one teacher, John Roberts, helped his students come to terms with racial hatred.

"I don't think you should ever shelter children from the truth," said Roberts. "I put the words 'white supremacist' on the board, and I had each child get a dictionary. We looked up the word, and we talked about our feelings.

"At first they wanted to kill the man who murdered Harold. They wanted to fry him. They wanted to drown him. All the horrible things you can imagine, they wanted to do. After we got through their anger, I said, 'Let's be real. We don't work like that in our society.

"'What would be some way we can positively let Harold's killer know that what he did was wrong and it hurt us?' The children said, 'We should write to him.'

"In their letters, the children's feelings ran the gamut, the same that adults' do. Children are very specific in their sense of justice. Some said, 'We hope that you stay in jail forever.' One wrote, 'We had our own hero. I was heartbroken.'"

John Roberts and his students attended their hero's funeral. Each carried a rose for the coffin.

"It was a real harsh lesson in life, in the reality of violence in our society, and that sometimes violence is based on racism."

TEACHING TOLERANCE

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Helping our children overcome hatred and prejudice is the aim of Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Half a million teachers receive its free magazine, and more than 50,000 schools have used its free curriculum kits. For more information on Teaching Tolerance, write to: 400 Washington Ave.; Montgomery, Alabama 36104. Fax: 334/264-3121.

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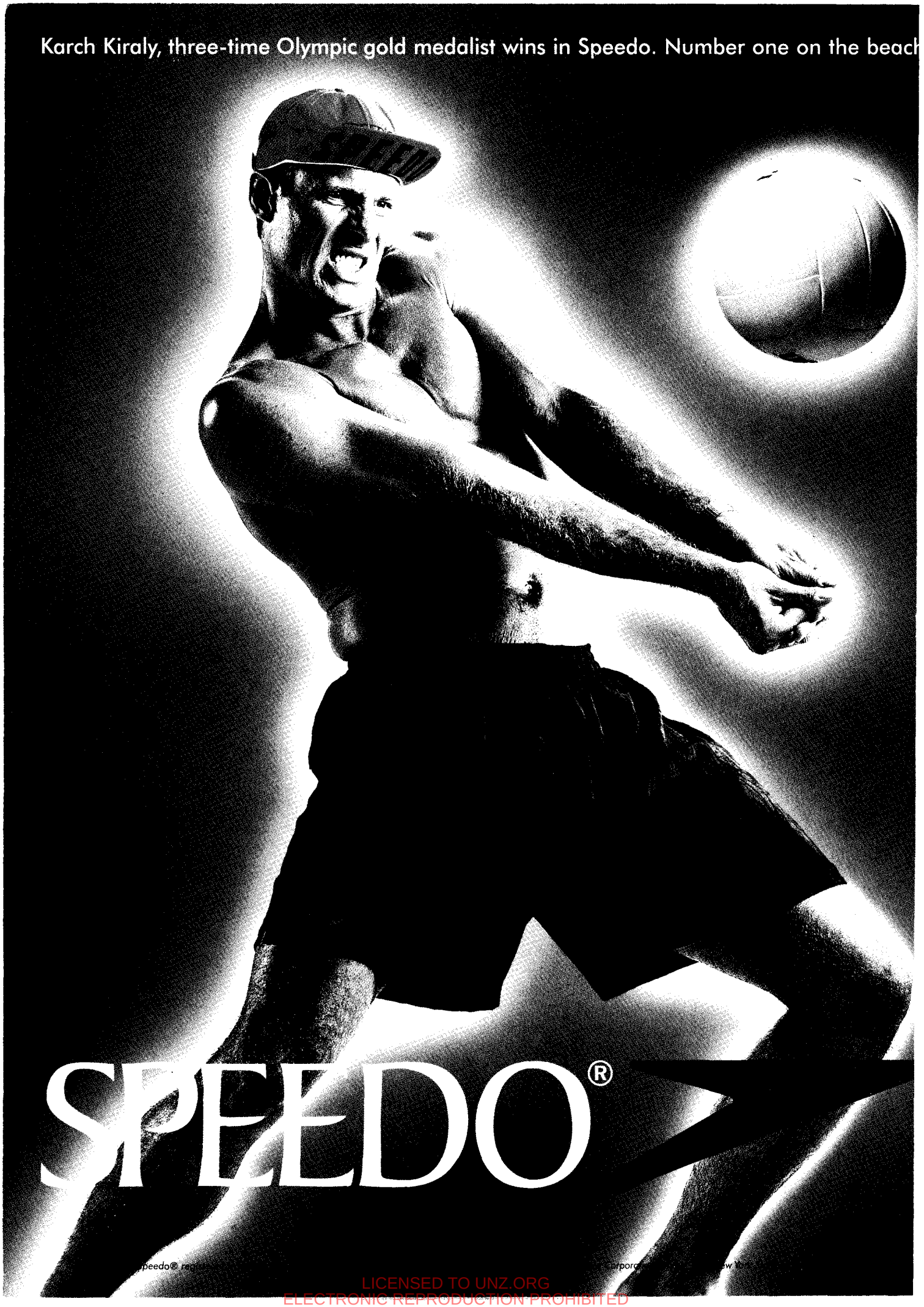

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